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The Heart of Education

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Inside Japanese Classrooms

The Heart of Education

Nancy E. Sato

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This book is dedicated to

—the Japanese who opened their hearts and inspired an unforgettable educational journey

—my family and friends who warm and calm my heart, especially my parents, Ken, Misa, and Sashi.

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Series Preface

This series of scholarly works in comparative and international education has grown well beyond the initial conception of a collection of reference books. Although retaining its original purpose of providing a resource to scholars, students, and a variety of other professionals who need to understand the role played by education in various societies or world regions, it also strives to provide accurate, relevant, and up-to-date information on a wide variety of selected educational issues, problems, and experiments within an international context.

Contributors to this series are well-known scholars who have devoted their professional lives to the study of their specializations. Without exception these men and women possess an intimate understanding of the subject of their research and writing. Without exception they have studied their subject not only in dusty archives, but have lived and traveled widely in their quest for knowledge. In short, they are “experts” in the best sense of that often overused word.

In our increasingly interdependent world, it is now widely understood that it is a matter of military, economic, and environmental survival that we understand better not only what makes other societies tick, but also how others, be they Japanese, Hungarian, South African, or Chilean, attempt to solve the same kinds of educational problems that we face in North America. As the late George Z. F. Bereday wrote more than three decades ago: “[E]ducation is a mirror held against the face of a people. Nations may put on blustering shows of strength to conceal public weakness, erect grand

façades to conceal shabby backyards, and profess peace while secretly arming for conquest, but how they take care of their children tells unerringly who they are" (*Comparative Methods in Education*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964, p. 5).

Perhaps equally important, however, is the valuable perspective that studying another education system (or its problems) provides us in understanding our own system (or its problems). When we step beyond our own limited experience and our commonly held assumptions about schools and learning in order to look back at our system in contrast to another, we see it in a very different light. To learn, for example, how China or Belgium handles the education of a multilingual society; how the French provide for the funding of public education; or how the Japanese control access to their universities enables us to better understand that there are reasonable alternatives to our own familiar way of doing things. Not that we can borrow directly from other societies. Indeed, educational arrangements are inevitably a reflection of deeply embedded political, economic, and cultural factors that are unique to a particular society. But a conscious recognition that there are other ways of doing things can serve to open our minds and provoke our imaginations in ways that can result in new experiments or approaches that we may not have otherwise considered.

Since this series is intended to be a useful research tool, the editor and contributors welcome suggestions for future volumes, as well as ways in which this series can be improved.

Edward R. Beauchamp
University of Hawaii

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Successful access to the Japanese educational world can only happen with introductions from highly respected educators, and Professor Hiroshi Azuma superbly paved the way in his thoughtful and gentle manner. Whenever we talked, he provoked engaging epiphanies that promoted

fruitful investigations in the field. His astute wisdom and versatile intellect are far greater than this book can convey.

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grandparents overcame discrimination to successfully build their lives in America, and my accomplishments are due to their hard work and perseverance. I owe everything to their strength of character, courage, sacrifice, diligence, and kind thoughtfulness. The value of their precious affection and heartwarming understanding is immeasurable.

This book itself has been a journey, and to those who have helped me this book is their book—the educational visions inspired are their own. Together our hearts have been touched and from here to Japan our connectedness will thrive. May the educational journey never end.

1
Introduction

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> Imagine a place where educators remind students that seeing and listening with one's eyes and ears are simple physical acts compared with the more substantial way of seeing and listening—with one's heart.[1] Moreover, the deepest way to perceive and truly understand is with your heart, not just with your mind.
>
> Imagine a place where a teacher's vision for his class is to have worked so hard together that when they accomplish their goal, they cry together—to have genuinely touched their hearts.
>
> Imagine a place where the teacher's reason for singing, even just 10 minutes at any point in the day, is to calm the students' hearts. Singing together is the only time when all those individual voices become one voice, united.
>
> Imagine a place where rather than punish a constantly disruptive boy, the teacher's explanation is that we must open our hearts to bring him in. Isolating him or taking away privileges denies him the very socialization opportunities he needs to improve.
>
> Imagine.

This place was Japan—the set of elementary schools I was fortunate to research, and the set of students, teachers, parents, and principals who were more than generous and truly kind enough to welcome me into their school families nearly every day for 2 years[2]—a deeply heartwarming experience. For me, it was a lesson on the power of togetherness, accomplishing so much more with others than I could have alone. As a matter of fact, I attended every day because it calmed my heart; I learned so much because we opened our hearts. And in the end, after three memorable performances,[3] including their graduation chorus, I had tears in my eyes—my heart was genuinely touched. Time and time again, educators reminded me that the

most profound goal of education is to develop one's heart, beyond the mind. Imagine what American schools might look and feel like if we attended to that many verbs for our hearts as we teach and learn together each day.

How do we make sense of the above images, alongside the many others that abound? Interest in the Japanese educational system has risen sharply; however, few researchers have carefully studied the most important aspect of education in Japanese schools—namely, the teaching-learning process. This intricate process unfolds in the daily interactions between teachers and students over the course of a year—even years—not during the brief classroom visits that most researchers undertake. Particularly in a society like Japan's, whose culture emphasizes clear-cut distinctions between insiders and outsiders and between ones public and private face, long-term research in the same class is necessary to observe the daily realities as actually experienced by Japanese students and teachers—the only way to understand with one's heart.

This book is based on my dissertation research study whose major goal was a systematic, well-informed examination and sensitive portrayal of classroom practices in an effort to elucidate educational processes that promote equity in classroom learning. This study employed ethnographic methods involving 2 years of in-depth observations, interviews, document analysis, and questionnaire administration in order to chronicle the daily lives of students and teachers in fifth–sixth–grade classrooms in two Tokyo public schools with highly contrasting socioeconomic backgrounds.[4]

The research database represents an unprecedented collection of on-site research data in the same Japanese classrooms. Data collection occurred from 1986 to 1989, but the findings distilled for this book remain relevant in several compelling ways: (1) ideas and concepts remain true to the observed classrooms yet resonate with Japanese across several generations

and from many parts of Japan; (2) knowledge, visions, and understanding gained from these rich data are timeless in their potential applicability; (3) in becoming intimately involved in the lives of these students and teachers, their enthusiasm and energy may inspire new ideas and renewed commitment to meaningful education for readers anywhere.

This book attempts to accomplish four major goals. First, by providing the most detailed description of daily life in Japanese schools and classrooms, a more comprehensive and deeper appreciation of Japanese education is possible, thus enabling a more sophisticated and nuanced context for understanding the wealth of statistics, research studies, news reports, and information readily available about specific aspects of the Japanese educational system. Second, because many current U.S. reform agendas and research studies on American education advocate practices that are commonplace in Japanese schools, the Japanese case may be quite instructive about the kinds of nested practices, hard work, refreshing beliefs, revised priorities, and budgetary allocations that may be necessary to actually accomplish these calls for reform.

Third, one of the most striking features of Japanese schooling, particularly in elementary schools, is also one of the most ardently espoused reforms for U.S. education: nurturing strong learning communities. This book illuminates the many interdependent factors that comprise the difficult work of creating and sustaining communities within classrooms and schools in Japan. It delineates several all-important structures, beliefs, processes, values, and interpersonal relations that constitute the invaluable support system for individuals involved in those communities. In a fascinating twist, this study found that “community” is not just a certain place or identifiable set of people, interests, and characteristics; rather “community” is also the ongoing set of relations, constantly evolving from moment to

moment throughout the day. Every moment constitutes a time and place of potential belonging—an instance of inclusion and exclusion—that simultaneously defines each teaching-learning moment in our daily lives, inside and outside school.

The key to all learning is the *quality* of relations, and when hearts are touched in equally meaningful fashion, inclusive of all, then *genuine* community is occurring, as human hearts inescapably develop in tandem with any academic focus on intellect or mind. Importantly, the seamless, interlocking quality of relations is cultivated from individual ones through whole school relations, extending to home and local community, not just within the classroom walls, where most school research is confined. One salient factor contributing to the high quality is the amount of time spent nurturing those relations with special attention given to the qualities of students' hearts throughout the day: Are they calm? open? understanding? touching? sincerely or artificially? deeply or superficially?

Indeed two notions weave through the above anecdotes: the centrality of "heart" (*kokoro*) and the necessity of togetherness. Both represent fundamental tenets of a Japanese educational philosophy that emerged over the course of my research.[5] Both operate on multiple levels of meaning as observed in their most effective educational sense. At the most obvious level as Americans would interpret them, everyone has a heart (emotional side) and togetherness refers to human relations.

But a more extended meaning exists with influential implications in the Japanese educational setting. "Heart" is the center of one's entire being, the *inseparable* combination of our mental, physical, emotional, aesthetic, and spiritual capacities, so "togetherness" also refers to an integrated self, the whole person. All the senses are engaged in our learning process and all those capacities must be accounted for in our daily learning. Although

learning through experience (*keiken*) is important, Japanese teachers often referred to a more comprehensive, deeper learning they sought to promote: *taiken* (whole body experience and understanding with one's whole body). And they have wonderful verbs describing how well one has learned—for example, *mi ni tsuku* (literally, "to attach to one's body") or *karada de oboeru* ("to remember with one's body"). Both imply a learning so deep that it becomes a part of oneself. Therefore, "togetherness" is also connectedness of one's whole self and one's relations to one's environment and larger community.

Taken even further, both have conceptual, systemic referents as well: "heart" as the core of a system and of the educational process itself, and "togetherness" as the ability to see connectedness. True learning must encompass all these aspects in an integrated, coherent fashion. A major theme of this book is connectedness as a highly effective educational tool: What kind of connectedness is fostered within and outside school, between subject matters and other studies, among different classes and grade levels, across the years, and between school work and real-world activities in context? Effective education depends on such connectedness: between all individuals, on multiple levels, between ideas and policies, between various parts of the system, as well as taking advantage of the unifying points among them. For education's sake, connectedness calls for coherence and thinking on an evolving continuum of issues, achievements, abilities, and ideas not easily sorted into groups or conveniently set in either-or terms of polar opposites.

In Japan, I realized that American discourse is riddled with a tendency to posit false dichotomies—often simplistic choices in an educational world populated with never-ending diversity that spans the spectrum. Dichotomous thinking artificially sets up the polar ends as problems of

either-or choices (to name a few—academic vs. nonacademic, cognitive vs. affective, individual vs. group, process vs. product, nature vs. nurture); however, they maybe more accurately portrayed as a problem of delicate balance, capitalizing on the interplay between opposing forces. Reasoned analysis necessarily calls for seeing the strengths and weaknesses of both ends and acknowledging the contributions and trade-offs entailed with any choice. The "either-or" setup fallaciously steers the debate toward blustery challenges of which end is the "right answer," while the true issue resides in both spheres, and the most effective solution needs to consider how both ends exert influence depending on circumstances and timing. Seeking complementarity unites, whereas polarity divides. As Ray McDermott, Professor, Stanford University School of Education, insightfully remarked in one conference, the ultimate false dichotomy is Japan vs. the United States, or any cross-national comparisons that posit generalized versions of which system is more or less admirable, as though the choice is so artificially simple or even meaningful, since it fails to recognize the range of practices and diversity of opinions within any country.

Education, in particular, is an arena least served by this kind of dichotomous thought. Although posing either-or dichotomies is a useful analytic tool, the utility of sustaining those abstractions into supposed representations of reality or practical solutions is questionable. Joint efforts (connectedness—capitalizing on complementarity) rather than separate camps (confined to opposing polarized ends) may propel efforts more productively forward. As one simple example, when faced with budget cuts, Americans more easily reduce music, art, and physical education programs, viewed as "extracurricular" frills. We actually accept the "arts vs. academics" as a choice, unlike Japanese elementary teachers who saw those same activities as *pivotal vehicles* for improved academic studies. I often

observed academic study time reduced in order to maintain countless hours spent on nonacademic endeavors. Though some Japanese complained of such long hours spent on relations-building and nonacademic activities, they also could not conceive of eliminating them. In fact, what Americans call “frills,” the Japanese viewed as integral to school success. After all, how can one relate to each student as a whole person without seeing their capabilities in all of these areas? How can one focus their attention without first capturing their attention?

Achievement in reading and math only occurs when one reads and computes “things.” Greater achievement relies on the breadth and depth of ones experience of these “things”; therefore, each person’s learning capital rests on the active engagement of all his or her senses, piquing imagination and awareness of “things” through direct whole-body experience. Actual achievement is an interaction of one’s true knowledge with an assortment of interdependent variables that determine one’s display of that knowledge. Measured achievement is a fragile distillation of one’s true capacities. Thus, another kind of dichotomous thought is far more dangerous—that of the sorting kind, such as high vs. low and success vs. failure. The danger lies in assuming far more characteristics in that “high” or “low” performance or ascribing global “success” or “failure” when in actuality a given performance represents a momentary measurement of a limited set of characteristics. As an evanescent representation of growth, the implications are grave when such mechanisms are used to sort, label, or otherwise result in educational decisions far from the original intent of the “measures” or performance.

Traditional Japanese and American ways of thinking differ in two potentially crucial ways from an educational standpoint. One is the avoidance of labels and sorting in Japanese elementary schools,

emphasizing effort above ability or standardized achievement tests. The second is the Japanese holistic notion of self. Perhaps the most profound difference between Japanese and American habits of mind[6] that has the most consequential impact on education is a different notion of individual self—one that by definition emphasizes the relational side in Japan, along with an integrated wholeness of heart. Consideration of one's relations with the surrounding social and physical context is incorporated into individual thoughts and actions. When relational qualities are of prime importance, time allocation, the kinds of learning activities, and participation in them are vastly affected, with considerable implications for the quality of life in classrooms and schools. The most notable difference observed in Japanese schools is the amount of time spent in extracurricular activities, field trips, ceremonies, and class meetings, and especially in reflection time. Reflection (*hansei*) is perhaps the most effective instructional mode, since it maintains a focus on the process as much as on the product and on one's responsibilities and growth—a useful means of monitoring self and others. When done well, reflection serves to foster self- and group-generated assessments that enable ongoing self-discipline and shared responsibilities. *Teaching and Learning in Japan*, edited by Thomas Rohlen and Gerald LeTendre, provides a brilliant overview of the range of teaching modes and sensibilities that follow from the relational notion of individual self, an integrated sense of self, and capitalizing on seemingly opposing techniques to engage all aspects of self.

Even with contrasting notions of individual self, one aspect shared by admirable teachers in both countries is their ability to inspire learning through quality relations that attend to children's integrated hearts. In fact, despite cultural and demographic differences, I discovered that regardless of the country, admirable schools and teachers philosophically and intuitively

share much more in common than they do with their less admirable counterparts within their respective countries. I was fortunate to witness excellent teachers in Japan, yet taken individually, they shared many characteristics, values, and practices with excellent teachers I have observed in the United States. Certain elements of successful schools and instances of powerful learning experiences can be very similar, not forgetting the necessary adaptations to local contexts and conditions. The only difference was the "standardization" of such excellence, built into the fabric of school and classroom organization and practices throughout Japan, and with more external community and family support, whereas the excellence occurs more idiosyncratically and individually in America. Perhaps it is not so ironic that the biggest contrast between the two cultures is also the most notable point of commonality shared by each country's most admirable educators: nurturing the relational, well-rounded self as an integral part of high academic goals.

For example, consider the following quotes from Japanese elementary teachers (Lewis, 1995, p. 36): "My job is to create happy memories"; and "children come to school to see their friends"; or a principal in my study who showed me the calligraphy of *kokoro* (heart) and said, "This is the ultimate goal of education—to develop the heart." Mr. Ito (teacher in my study) also explained that each student needs a friend, and if you make the lessons interesting, you don't need rewards or punishments, and the behavior problems go away. Yet also consider this American elementary teacher's quote (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 69): "Most of all I am trying to get the children to really enjoy being in school—to enjoy learning and thinking and investigating on their own and growing to become really decent people." Are we really that different?[7] When I share these stories with American educators, they readily agree, so the real question becomes:

Even with many similar values and beliefs, why is it so difficult to spread such excellence throughout our system?

Therefore, a fourth goal of the book is to begin to identify commonalities among the most powerful educational experiences regardless of the country or culture.[8] Two such common ingredients that permeate the best educational experiences in both countries are passion (requiring heart) and compassion (requiring connectedness and empathy for others). Both invoke our hearts and perhaps are the heart of educational success, which emanates from and results in connectedness, a *touching of the hearts*. Moreover, while they are needed to successfully carry forth learning, they are also the ultimate product of such learning; the more they are invoked, the more they develop, deepen, and expand, both for self and others. These notions are not meant to promote any romantic vision or to underestimate the most difficult work of daily teaching and learning in school life; but they highlight poignant memories and set a vision for that journey—one that mandates cannot dictate and test scores or other numeric accountability standards cannot measure. Accountability standards and assessment must include both.

Passion and compassion can be demonstrated by setting forth hardship (*kuroo*), which encourages educational growth through hard work and the kind of suffering that accompanies it. Educative suffering involves constructive action and progress. Importantly, appropriate support structures must accompany these efforts—sometimes communities need strict discipline, clear limits, and consistent enforcement of tough love (see Rohlen, Hori, and Hare in Rohlen & LeTendre, 1998). Such suffering and toughness can lead to effective growth when the vehicle is a trusting, caring relationship between teacher(s) and learner(s). Whether strict or warm, the educative relationship must include high standards, clear goals, relevant

feedback, constructive action, and, most of all, a firm belief in the eventual success and increased competence of each learner, especially when accomplished collectively. This educative process must be grounded in the learners' realities, involving them in setting these goals and standards and providing feedback whenever possible, in order to sustain perseverance through the hardships. Conversely, warm, fuzzy environments can exist without inspired learning, where superficial kindness masks the actual hollow relations that lack mutual conviction for everyone's success. Misplaced "compassion" without conviction, high standards, constructive action, and feedback probably lacks the passion necessary to inspire hard work, perseverance, and endurance.

The interesting question then becomes: How are some practices identical and how do some differ radically in order to produce the same inspiration for learning in differing cultural environments and with differing individuals? The final goal seeks to demonstrate how the above ideas were orchestrated in the observed Japanese settings as a catalyst for inspiring educators everywhere, as I was inspired in the course of my daily research.[9]

What aspects of the Japanese school setting maximize student access to, participation in, and successful completion of learning activities? This study documents countless ways that equity concerns are promoted within Japanese elementary schools. For instance, a curriculum with an impressive array of learning activities contributes to a broader range of students having access to classroom learning and receiving recognition for success in something, even if it is not math or reading. Within schools, all students in the same grade level receive the same materials, participate in all activities, and share leadership roles and responsibilities regardless of achievement, behavior, or ability. On the other hand, the same areas that promote a wonderful sense of community and broad-based participation within

classrooms may cause another form of inequity for those who do not keep pace with the crowd. Addressing educational equity concerns often involves trade-offs: some educational needs are well served, while others are not accommodated. Similarly, although my overall research experience was positive, be forewarned that for every positive instance cited, several critical points of caution and the potential for adversity exist, and the Japanese are often their own most ardent and careful critics (see bibliography listings for: Amano, Asano, Azuma, Fujita, Horio, Inagaki, Motani, Okano, Satake, M. Sato, Shimahara, Takeuchi, Tsuneyoshi, Wagatsuma, Yamashita, and Yoshida.)

One particularly ironic finding is that academic achievement seems to be fostered by spending more time in nonacademic areas, such as interpersonal relations, art, music, physical education, and special events and ceremonies. Important focal points and results of these nonacademic areas are maximizing participation and increasing awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of all students. After all, genuine community rests on getting to know each other well, which requires such diversity. When interpersonal relations are working well, teaching, learning, and classroom management are neither linear (just teacher to student) nor authoritative acts in need of control. Rather, teaching, learning, and student supervision and control are part of the same process: one of *mutual assistance* founded upon trust and caring relations. Each member of the classroom and school community is at once a teacher and a learner in the fluid moments of classroom instruction, as long as they are actively assisting others. In reality, this mutual assistance is carefully constructed connectedness, beginning with self-control and self-discipline that rests solidly on peer supervision and friendship. When done with empathy, such supervision is the natural outgrowth of friendship within community and can result in deeper, ongoing friendship, or at the

very least, communal obligation in a nice ecological cycle fueling each other.

Thus, instead of the American three *Rs* (reading, writing, and arithmetic), four Cs stood out as aspects of educational excellence: *community, connectedness, commitment,* and *caring*. And the four Cs depend on passion and compassion. The following quote from a veteran Japanese teacher sums these ideas well: “Teaching is like an art…. The art of teaching entails… efforts to cultivate close, personal relations with children to establish mutual trust. Effective teaching is possible only when that mutual trust permeates the learning environment” (Shimahara & Sakai, 1992). Shimahara and Sakai (1995, p. 68) elaborate on this notion in their observations regarding the “emotional distance” of American teachers compared with Japanese teachers who “emphasize emotional closeness and attachment as a fulcrum to achieve their pedagogical goals… [and] saw the motivation for learning and achievement as being stimulated by the emotional ties, often called *kizuna*, created between the teacher and children. *Kizuna* are interpersonal relationships that foster empathy and what is characterized as the ‘touching of the hearts’.” Other researchers have noted similar differences in cultural styles, schooling, and mother–infant relationships (Azuma, Kashiwagi, & Hess, 1981; Lewis, 1989, 1995; White, 1987; Kotloff, 1988; Shimahara & Sakai, 1992; Shwalb, 1996; Tsuneyoshi, 2001).

The same sentiment was echoed memorably by an outstanding teacher notable for his successful work with Osaka minority students.[10] When I asked how he managed to turn these students around, I was surprised at his deceptively simple answer. He replied that all they needed was to develop a trusting relationship with an adult. Teachers may spend numerous hours (before school, during recess, and at lunch) playing with their students and

building relations with them before even opening a book in the first weeks or months of school (see Chapter 4). Importantly, trust honors individual self at the same time that it affirms the individual's place in the social universe. And in the instant that individual identity in the social web is established, a vexing struggle begins between the inescapable urge to assert one's self alongside the inescapable necessity to submerge that selfish impulse in favor of the group's well-being. In an interesting catch-22, the better a group's well-being, the more self-affirmation multiplies, yet the same group well-being depends on self-sacrifice as well: a crucial relational interplay.

Indeed, the most outstanding finding of this ethnographic study was a revelation that our notion of the "basics," which are "academic basics" (the three *Rs*), is not as basic as the foundation from which the Japanese begin: the "relational basics," epitomized by *kizuna*. In fact, the basis for the academic basics is the four Cs, or even more accurately, a set of Japanese terms I call the five *K*s:[11] *kankei*, *kimochi kuroo keiken*, *kokoro*. Reciting their syllables as we recite the ABCs, this may be called the *ka-ki-ku-ke-ko* of Japanese education. Roughly translated, the words respectively mean relationships, emotions, hardship, experience, and heart. Deceptively simple words, but the expanse of their true meaning can only be understood through elaboration of daily school life as Japanese students and teachers experience it. Hopefully, their deeper meaning and extent of their educational import will resonate with each reader in refreshing ways by the book's end.

Before heading into the Tokyo neighborhoods and schools, Chapter 2 sets the stage by reviewing the rationale behind the study, including brief summaries of the bodies of literature that framed the study, the research methodology and database, and the conceptual framework that guided data

collection and analysis. Since the primary purpose of the book is an in-depth description of classroom life, Chapter 3 begins our journey into the school settings: the neighborhoods, school facilities, school and classroom organization, educational materials, and teacher work arrangements. To embellish this framework, Chapter 4 adds life to the landscape by exploring the school week and year in the students' lives. Without even exploring classroom instruction in detail, just a review of the school calendar, subject matter studies, ceremonies, extracurricular activities, recess, lunch, class meetings, and other student responsibilities reveals an emphasis beyond academics as an integral feature of Japanese elementary school life. Chapters 5 and 6 delve into the more academic sides of classroom instruction, uncovering two very different classroom realities and instructional patterns yet some surprising commonalities underlying this diversity. Chapters 7 and 8 conclude with the major findings of the study, especially those regarding the fundamental importance of attending to the relational basics.

This book's focus on the praiseworthy egalitarian quality of within-school practices must be understood alongside the fact that significant between-school inequality exists along with great inequity produced by the differential economic power of parents to enroll their children in after-school studies and to send students to special exam schools. Admirable equity in interpersonal processes at the microlevels within classrooms and schools sometimes rests uneasily with macrolevels of Japanese society and cultural traditions steeped in hierarchical, rigidly prescribed roles and social structures that reveal many status, gender, and nationalistic differences. On one hand, the inequity between schools mirrors that within the society; on the other hand, those same inequities create substantial pressure, personal sacrifices, and cause for resentment and complaints among many Japanese

(Amano, 1992, 1996; Asano, 2000; Azuma, 1994; Fujita, 1978; Horio, 1986, 1988, 1995a, 1996; Okano, 1999; Rohlen, 1977, 1980; Shields, 1989; Takeuchi, 1991; Tsuneyoshi, 2001; Watanabe, 2000; Yoshida, 2002.) Interestingly, some of Japan's current education reforms and policy making at the national level may work against those same practices that their best practitioners manage to maintain (M. Sato, 1998).

While this book exposes the negative aspects where possible, the positive elements prevail in this study's findings because instances of educational excellence far outweighed the negative instances in the observed settings. Perhaps the greatest proof of the power of passion and compassion motivating educational participation and growth is that although my original research plan was 1 year of intermittent observation in two schools, I ended up going to two schools nearly daily for 2 years and observing in four other schools for 1 month each. The passion and fascination evoked in my heart by the compassion and warmth of the teachers and students prompted my 6 a.m. daily departure in preparation for a 1- to 2-hour crowded commute involving two buses and two train lines. I could easily endure conditions that I would have considered hardships anywhere else because I was so stimulated by the unpredictable diversity of learning experiences and because everyone was subject to the same conditions without exception. These experiences enlivened each day for me, which made "going to school" irresistible. Regardless of how tired I was, I had to attend. What more could an educator want to instill in a student?

In a thoroughly welcome role reversal, I felt less like a researcher and more like a student. While my desire was both to see friends and to experience all activities together with them, I also felt motivated to teach and just wished that I had my own classroom: apprenticeship as a marvelous teacher education program. I realized I was not only learning

about their educational system (my original intent) but was learning just as much about how to be a good Japanese student, how to be a better (more culturally appropriate) Japanese citizen, and most heartfelt, how to be a better person. If these are not the ultimate goals for education in every society, what are?

In sum, I learned about *kankei* (relationships), *kimochi* (emotions), *kuro* (endurance, hardship), *keiken* (rich, direct experience), and *kokoro* (heart), and the crucial role they play in defining the quality of education and the potential efficacy of teaching-learning processes within schools and classrooms. By the end of this book's journey, I hope they become part of each reader's educational repertoire—a set of irresistible educational goals and principles understood with your heart.

Notes

1. The Japanese writing system reflects this with two different *kanji* (ideograph characters). One set of ideographs mean the mere physical acts "to see" and "to hear," but the educators showed students the same *kanji* with the "heart" symbol added to the left side of the ideograph, creating a new ideograph with the additional more extensive and inclusive meaning of hearing and seeing with one's heart as well.
2. Anyone who has done research in Japan appreciates how rare this opportunity is, and anyone who has ever spent time in classrooms appreciates the generosity and tolerance the educators and students showed by allowing me to be there so often! Please see the methodological appendix (N. Sato, 1991) for the dissertation research design and methods, which included schools beyond the two Tokyo schools.

3. One happened when a special needs girl attempted a handspring over a vault before the teacher could get there to spot her. To everyone's surprise, she actually did it for the first time in her life. After a brief moment of silence, the whole class cheered and clapped for her, congratulating her wholeheartedly. In a second incident, after practicing weeks to do a human pyramid without being able to do it all together, at their fall sports day the entire grade was able to accomplish the feat all together in front of their families. And the third incident occurred after I did a presentation about being a minority in the United States to a group of minority students in Japan. After the talk, some students were able to talk about their situations for the first time in their lives and their teachers were very thankful.
4. See Chapter 2.5, "Research Methodology," for details.
5. Japanese and American researchers have not clearly articulated a singular Japanese theory of education or identified a Japanese educational philosophy. Yet based on my research, these two features would be a core part of such a philosophy.
6. This purposefully plays on Robert Bellah's seminal work, *Habits of the Heart* (1986).
7. I have always felt the most meaningful and potentially fruitful educational exchange would be between teachers (in the form of long-term visits and dialogue), rather than the usual nonpractitioner-type exchange that more commonly occurs.
8. This latter goal can be measured by the number of nods from educators as they identify with certain examples or passages contained in this book.
9. In fact, one ideal research project would be to gather together top practitioners from many countries to document and share their

successes in order to create as many powerful learning experiences for the most students regardless of the country. After all, a constant goal and dilemma for U.S. and Japanese schooling is how to attain the greatest achievement for the most students.

10. Besides the Tokyo schools, I conducted research in two minority schools in Osaka and two rural schools in Nagano. Common themes from those schools were reflected in the Tokyo sample, and this book focuses on those generalizable points, though contrasting elements are noted where relevant and appropriate for balance and understanding. The primary minorities in the Osaka schools were *burakumin* and Korean, respectively (see Chapter 2, footnote 14).
11. This abstraction is purely my own analysis and I am responsible for any of its failings, but I hope it provokes more stimulating debate and motivates more potent educational reforms, since I believe any educational reforms that do not take these elements into account will remain superficial or misinformed. For simplification purposes, *kankei* incorporates the term *kizuna* (Shimahara & Sakai, 1995). *Ka* is the *ka* that begins *kankei*, *ki* is for *kimochi*, *ku* as in *kuroo*, *ke* as in *keiken*, and *ko* for *kokoro*.

2
Setting the Stage

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2.1 Education—Contemporary Japan

Information about Japan is now readily available in the United States. Regarding Japanese society, certain images abound: homogeneous, group oriented, conforming, polite, quiet, and hardworking. Neutral or negative images about the educational system include nationally controlled curriculum, centralized school system, rigid or highly structured, rote learners, lack of individual expression, noncreative, examination hell, bullying, *kyoiku mama* (education "mom"), and *juku* (cram school). On the more positive side, others glowingly praise Japanese creativity, enthusiasm, discipline, persistence, diligence, and high achievement. But behind all of the criticisms or praise is an implicit assumption that the Japanese educational system, represented by its schools, has in large part contributed to Japan's postwar prosperity. Yet without examining that indispensable and substantial intermediary between policy, structure, mandated curriculum, and the supposed outcomes, any assumed links are circumstantial at best.

The past decade has produced increasingly informative research on Japanese education (published in English: Beauchamp, 1998a-e; Lewis, 1995; Lewis & Leestma, 1987; Lewis & Tsuchida, 1997, 1998; OERI, 1998; Peak, 1991, 1996; Rohlen & LeTendre, 1998; LeTendre, 1996, 1999; M. Sato, 1995, 1998; Shimahara & Sakai, 1995; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992;

Stigler and Hiebert, 1999; Tobin, 1991; Tsuchimochi, 1993; Tsuneyoshi, 2001; White, 1987). This research primarily targets specific subject matters especially math and science (Fujioka, Lewis, Nakayama, Peak, Stevenson, Stigler, Takemura, Tsuchida, Wilson, Yuzawa), the teaching context (Beauchamp, Lee, Shimahara & Sakai, Stevenson, Yang), preschools and early elementary grades (Boocock, Hendry, Hoffman, Holloway, Lewis, Peak, Shwalb, Tobin, Tsuneyoshi, White), middle schools and adolescence (LeTendre, Fukuzawa, Shimizu), and Japanese identity and psychology (Befu, Hatano, McConnell, Shimizu, Tobin). Middle school research is essential for revealing the juncture between the hierarchical, predominantly lecture mode of high school instruction and the more egalitarian, whole-person involvement in elementary education. While middle school instructional patterns are more like high schools, the same whole-person emphases and broad roles for teachers exist, especially in their notion of *shido* (guidance; LeTendre, 2000; Shimizu 1992). Emphases on knowledge acquisition as an experiential process involving the whole body, especially for mastering the fundamentals through certain forms, on the nature of teacher-learner relations, on reflection, and on effort and hardship are similar to those reported in this book.

The most recent extensive cross-national study, the TIMSS study (OERI, 1998), contributed more meaningful case studies to the observational and testing database. The best insight into approaches to teaching and learning across a wide spectrum of learning situations can be found in Rohlen and LeTendre (1998).

Long-term, in-depth ethnographic research into classrooms and schools is essential for many reasons. One continuing dilemma is that though many images and reports seem contradictory to the American eye, they often rest complementarily within an interlocking Japanese context and must be

understood. Because past methodologies have relied more on brief visits to many classrooms, only the structure, outcomes, and surface features have been accessible. Moreover, past studies have tried to apply Western schemes and terminology or predetermined frames of reference onto the Japanese case, possibly overlooking the cohesive, significant features evident only when probing from the inside out.

We need to get beyond the surface features and our own frames of reference to avoid the ever-present danger of misinterpretation and overgeneralization of findings without understanding the interconnected whole. Despite increasingly interesting video, textbook, and instructional studies that paint captivating snapshots for understanding particular aspects of classroom processes, the entire classroom landscape is still rather vague. The day-to-day classroom life is colorless, and students' perspectives largely remain off the canvas altogether.

The lack of a broader, meaningful cultural context for understanding the reported statistics and facts has substantial implications. Simply lengthening the school year or increasing time on task will not be fruitful if teaching methods and quality of educational experiences offered are not effective. Knowledge, philosophies, social processes, teaching styles, learning tasks, and student work are embedded in a cultural context. Statistics are misleading when isolated apart from the circumstances that breed these numbers and when conceived in generalized terms, not appreciating the true diversity underlying the aggregation of such numbers. The most prominent examples are the high test scores, high school graduation rates, and number of hours and days spent in school in Japan.

For example, the structure of the job market and business practices may influence Japanese high school graduation rates more than educational policies or in-school practices. Placement, promotion, and income are often

strictly tied to educational attainment level and prestige of one's university. Similarly, success in test scores may reflect college admissions policies and a high incidence of test-taking practice done outside school rather than within classroom time. Certainly, the Japanese school year is 60 days longer than the U.S. school year, but many of the extra days and hours are spent in nonacademic activities rather than in a preponderance of academic activities. In the observed schools, the time difference does not translate into much more math and reading time, as it does into much more art, music, physical education, moral education, club activities, field trips, and special events.

Finally, these numbers mask the captivating aspects of what is happening educationally in elementary classrooms. At one Tokyo school with elite college-bound students, music is just another subject matter to study; hushed voices go through the motions of singing, yet these students are all above grade level in math and writing. In class discussions, the same students always raise their hands or blurt their answers, and the teacher has to preface his introduction of new topics with comments like, "I know some of you have already studied this in *jukuy* but some people have not learned this, so please be patient. Reviewing the material will be helpful for you anyway." Across the city, in a school with few college-bound students, the teacher has to call on students to elicit answers and sometimes must review material studied in earlier grades to get through the lesson. Yet this teacher loves music, and his students fill the air with voluminous rich voices in three-part harmony. Although many students are below grade level in math and writing, their moving renditions of *haiku* (a form of Japanese poetry) reveal that these students have found a voice—not only their own voice in reciting poetry but also a community voice in their choral masterpieces.

At a school in a rural area with a mix of students above, at, and below grade level, the teacher merely starts a class discussion with an observation and a puzzling question. Suddenly, all the students passionately raise their hands and begin yelling their intended answer. Once the teacher calls on the first student, the student stands up, has control of the floor, gives her or his explanation, and calls on the next students for their opinions. The rapid-fire succession of comments and explanations, interspersed with virtually the entire class raising hands and yelling to capture the speakers attention, is confusing to the uninitiated observer, but soon the enthusiasm and engagement are moving and powerfully contagious. Moreover, the choral excellence of these students is also stunning: their bodies sway and bounce in tune, their faces enrapt with effort and emotion.

Numbers cannot capture the essence of these educational differences. In fact, my overall impression of Japanese elementary schools is *Variety*. It characterizes the curriculum and special events, as well as the range of philosophies, procedures, and ways of conducting classrooms and learning activities. The very aspects of Japanese elementary schools that I found most inspirational and educationally engaging cannot be assigned numerical value and do not translate into standard deviations. Many of these significant educational moments occur minute to minute in classrooms.

Upon entering the classroom, several contradictions to Americans' images of Japan and Japanese education immediately become apparent. Students can be yelling, laughing, and hitting or sitting in quiet concentration at their desks; students can be scattered, wrestling, running, and rowdy or aligned in uniform postures exhibiting attentive decorum. Students take no nationally standardized tests, yet parents and politicians are not pressuring elementary schools to install such an accountability system; constant chatter weaves on- and off-task across 40 bodies during a

lesson, yet learning occurs and work is accomplished. Students can be given the exact same materials and assignments but create individually expressive and distinct projects.

Homogeneous? From an educator's point of view, I met hundreds of students who defied any grouping into a category of homogeneous. Group oriented? Children are children, and Japanese children are no different: refreshingly opinionated, at once self-centered and selfish, generous and giving. Like their attention spans, moods shift instantaneously, elation and disappointment are deeply felt, and individual attention and recognition are sought and appreciated. Conforming? Only by surface appearance because sincere individuality and opposing views exist within.

Entering the classroom, the reality is that one teacher is responsible for covering the same curriculum with as many as 45 fast-growing fifth graders representing a diverse range of skills and abilities, so how significant is "homogeneity"? Entering the classroom, the "nationally controlled" curriculum taught by different teachers engenders significant variance in participatory experiences for students sitting in classrooms side by side, so what does "standardized" really mean? Entering the classroom, despite standard procedures and attention to correct forms of behavior, students and teachers find individual means of expression, so when and where is "uniformity"? Entering the classroom, daily classroom life is characterized by interruptions to the regular schedule and detours from the planned curriculum, so what is "rigid"? Entering the classroom…

Tokyo, Japan, 1987

"Okay!" he yells with a hearty, booming voice that belies his thin, almost frail appearance and graying hair. Mr. Ito enters the classroom as he does each morning with a quick gait, an arm full of papers, and his gray school bag over one shoulder. Meanwhile, the students momentarily interrupt their

noisy chatter, teasing, games, and spontaneous laughter, and begin returning to their seats, adjusting their notebooks and pencils, or straightening their lockers in the back of the room. Although the clamor subsides, it is never fully quiet as Mr. Ito explains a few details about the school day in his animated voice and his speedy delivery. His students live within walking distance of school in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Tokyo. Most of their parents have not graduated from college and none of the students attend academic *juku* to prepare for entrance examinations to elite secondary schools.

On the other side of the city, Mr. Seki enters the classroom in silence, with his calm, even pace and with his papers carefully organized and placed in hand. His serious countenance yields ever so slightly in a few lively glances or an upturned smile in response to some antics or quips from the students, but he quickly returns to a pensive look. Here, too, the students must set aside their important gossip and playful jabs to start their day, and although quiet falls upon the classroom more quickly and definitively, a murmur can be heard here and there. Mr. Seki begins the day's explanation, as always, in his evenly paced, almost monotone voice with carefully selected words and in an organized fashion. Although most students live within walking distance to school, several commute by train. Because the school has a good reputation for its graduates successfully passing entrance examinations to elite secondary schools and colleges, many students use friends' or relatives' addresses to be able to attend this school situated in one of the wealthiest areas in Tokyo. Most parents are college graduates, and all but one student attend academic *juku* or have private tutoring arrangements in their homes.

As vastly different as their looks, ways of speaking and acting, approach to teaching, and school populations are, Mr. Ito and Mr. Seki are both

excellent teachers who manage to motivate, teach, and engage a wide variety of students in a diverse array of subject matters and activities. And, despite the fact that Mr. Ito and Mr. Seki are fifth-grade teachers and are therefore subject to following the same curriculum scrupulously controlled by the Ministry of Education, they find room for creativity and variation within the confines of that nationally mandated curriculum. For example, Mr. Seki gave tests almost daily, whereas Mr. Ito gave tests at most once a week and often these were used as study devices rather than for assessment purposes. Mr. Seki rarely had students sing unless they needed to prepare for an upcoming event or ceremony, whereas Mr. Ito often finished lessons early to practice choral singing. The difference in results was stunning. In Mr. Seki's class, lifeless voices went through the motions and blank faces uttered words in self-conscious hesitancy, whereas Mr. Ito's students filled the air with strong, melodious voices giving life to songs in two- or three-part harmony. Their faces portrayed the feeling and effort that the songs invoked.

Although the concepts covered may be identical, the textbooks are different,[1] and the actual classroom activities and content could differ dramatically or be strikingly similar. As I observed from the moment students arrived at school until they left at the end of the day, the initial contradictions turned into paradoxes. Throughout the study, several puzzling notions kept teasing my brain.

The first puzzling notion is that excellence comes in many forms and styles even within the framework of a "standardized" curriculum. Clearly, the Ministry of Education can control the curriculum "stuff," but they cannot mandate the curriculum "process." In other words, the overall curriculum, the textbooks, and the sequence of concepts and skills are regulated in massive, detailed guides, but how that "stuff" is translated from

the page and into the hearts and minds of students is the teachers' domain, and the operational and experienced curricula[2] are the essential level of analysis regarding equity concerns and for judging educational impact on students. What constitutes educational equity and inequity in the experienced curriculum? What is the essence of excellence within the observed diversity?

The second puzzle centers around the contrasting images or contradictions between American images of Japanese schooling and Japanese society and the reality I witnessed in classrooms. At first I felt the aim was to determine which was right and which was wrong. In the end, I concluded that the images were both right and wrong, and in securing more information, the aim was to fine-tune my understanding of who, what, when, where, how, and to what extent the images were meaningful and meaningless. The process of becoming "smarter" about Japanese education and society was a process of spending more and more time in the same setting to be able to become more and more aware of the diverse criteria and conditions that influence actions, utterances, and decisions in each situation. I discovered heterogeneity within homogeneity, uniformity as the starting point for variety, standardization as a catalyst for creativity, and individualization as a means to become group oriented.

The third puzzle follows from the second: these seemingly opposing ideas and contradictory practices at face value actually formed complementary processes to somehow complete a coherent educational whole. For example, much play and goofing off one moment allow for hard work and discipline the next; rowdy behavior and thunderous noise are seen as necessary antecedents to quiet concentration; and standardization and structure serve as a springboard for diversity. Because everyone knows what is supposed to be standard and when, the system is not threatened by

individual detours from the norm. When group priority is acknowledged at appropriate times, individualism and individual expression may be tolerated at other times. Granted, social and systemic pressures still act to limit the range of detours, and Japanese privately resent these constraints, but flexibility in practice and in process allows the structure to maintain itself, to remain intact, and to appear "rigid." Like the enchanting prints of Dutch artist, M. C. Escher, judging equity issues and nurturing educational growth often amount to focusing alternatively on the black or white sides, and to discerning the transition between black and white, where the edges of one define the other. The absence or presence of one delineates the other and sustains the whole.

Consider the importance of verbal and nonverbal instruction (or direct and nondirect teaching). In Hori's (1998) explanation of Zen monastery training, he reveals a wonderful range of learning modes, characterized nicely by his notions of teaching *by* teaching and teaching *without* teaching. The latter is characterized by the power of nondirect practice, even silence, to teach by allowing us to come to our own awareness and revelations. Similar teaching techniques predominate in other spheres of life, such as in traditional crafts, as Singleton (1989b) noted in a pottery apprenticeship where one goal was "to get the answer without having to ask a question."

Indeed, our most powerful learning occurs through absorption made possible with immersion and repetition of experience, especially in a culture where one ideal is "to understand without being told" (Befu, 1971). In addition, the notion of "entering through form" (*katachi de haeru*, Rohlen, 1998; see also Hori's discussion of formalism in the same volume) reverberates in many areas of Japanese elementary school life. Endless practice in certain forms and emphasis on such precision (*kichinto* or *chanto*) as a predecessor or companion to more divergent, refined forms of

learning made me realize the complementary importance of both. One wonderful phrase in Japanese is *mi ni tsuku* (literally, to attach to one's body, or to know something so well it becomes automatic). Carefully planned times of drill and repetition that engrain the basic skills as part of one's body therefore free the mind to achieve greater levels of creativity and accomplishment. Whereas I, too, entered Japan completely against "drill and kill" methods of instruction, I left; appreciating the value of such repetition and drill for mastering the basics from which greater creativity and achievement could emerge. The crucial elements that make these drills effective are an acceptance of hard work and hardship as part of an educational process and that they are set in a meaningful context striving for high standards, coupled with a sense of belonging, guided by peers and adults who care about each other and give sincere and meaningful feedback.

Many successful educational practices rely on the interface between seemingly opposing sides dancing on the edges to craft the educable moment. Intuition often guides the artful maneuvers of teachers, whose greatest moments occur in knowing when to step in, when to fade back, when to speak up, and when to play their silent card. This essence is common to expert teachers I have observed regardless of the country, culture, or subject.

Where Westerners pose analytically convenient dualisms as dichotomous choices, we may miss those very opportunities to dance on the edges, to capitalize on the interplay where educational success and efficiency may reside. As one example in Japan, the interplay of individual and group attention allows the group orientation to appear salient. I found a heightened awareness of individualism is necessary to foster the cooperative group work and cohesion apparent in Japanese classrooms. In both Japan and the United States, group orientation and individualism exist;

they only differ in the time and place where group or individualistic tendencies are expressed in culturally appropriate ways. In Japan, an intriguing mix of sensitivity to individual personalities, strengths, and weaknesses at times encouraged smooth group work and at other times interfered and had to be tempered in favor of group consensus. The natural human tendency to think, judge, and act from one's own perspective is moderated (often reluctantly) by acknowledgment of group precedence, especially in the public domain.

Based on my observations, many preconceived notions about Japan and Japanese education are superficially correct, but when interpreted apart from the deeper cultural context and when misconstrued as monolithic truths, they serve more as screens that obscure a genuine understanding of the people and of classroom learning. As I saw the interconnectedness of a variety of educational activities, modes of interaction, and teaching philosophies, I found many of the terms used to describe the Japanese or Japanese education must be redefined in their own cultural context to clarify the underlying multidimensional complexity.

Educational anthropology's greatest contributions have been such redefinition and the consequent fresh insights into teaching and learning through long-term, in-depth research of settings in order to uncover the native participants' perspectives (Spindler, 2000; Ogbu, Kim, & Sato, 1993). Such groundbreaking research has revealed the importance of language, culture, and specific contexts for learning, especially illuminating alternative perspectives and the situated nature of cognition and learning (for examples, see Au, 1980; Delpit, 1995, 2002; Erickson, 1975, 1984; Fetterman, 1998; Grantham-Campbell, 1998, 2003; Heath, 1983, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave, Murtaugh, & De la Rocha, 1984; McDermott, 1974; Mehan, 1986, 1989,

1996; Ogbu, 1978, 1992, 2003; Rogoff, 1994, 2003; Rogoff et al, 1984, 1993, 1996, 2001; Spindler, 2000; Stack, 1974, 1996; Varenne & McDermott, 1999). Some of their major contributions have been problematizing our familiar assumptions; or as Erickson explains, “making the familiar strange.” One essential feature of ethnographic methodology is daily, repeated immersion in the same settings to discover patterns that may run counter to our common assumptions. In the following description of Japanese student life, I report my findings as they emerged, situated in the their original research context so that readers may better comprehend their derivation, but at risk of being somewhat repetitive. Hoping to do justice to their work, this work follows in the anthropological tradition and details life in Japanese classrooms to shed light on interesting ways to define the “individual,” “teaching,” “learning,” “cognition,” and “the basics” to be able to educate all students to high standards for academic achievement and democratic citizenship.

2.2 Education—Contemporary United States

In *The Right to Learn*, Darling-Hammond (1997, p. 107) reveals “nine key features of environments that support the kinds of meaningful learning seen today in successful restructured schools” to promote both competence and community:

1. Active in-depth learning
2. Emphasis on authentic performance
3. Attention to development
4. Appreciation for diversity
5. Opportunities for collaborative learning
6. Collective perspective across the school
7. Structures for caring

8. Support for democratic learning
9. Connections to family and community

Additionally, many nationally recognized reform programs (Accelerated Schools, Child Development Project, Coalition of Essential Schools, Complex Instruction, Fostering a Community of Learners, Jasper Series, Project Zero, NCREST, School Development Program, Schools for Thought, Success for All, Small Schools movement, to name a few) have demonstrated success in American schools where they have managed to focus attention on teaching-learning processes that promote active, collaborative learning, collective or community perspectives, structures for caring or personalization, stronger connectedness to families and community, and democratic participatory structures and processes along with high academic standards.

Ironically, in this ethnographic study of Japanese elementary schools (N. Sato, 1991), those same features stood out. Two questions arise: (1) What can we learn from this intriguing convergence of like-minded interests, despite contrasting cultural and historical traditions and populations? (2) Is there some essence in these powerful teaching-learning environments—whether American or Japanese—that enable more equitable education through nurturing strong communities of learners? While Darling-Hammond argues eloquently for the changes necessary to promote educational equity for all students, an enlightening finding from my Japanese research is that when community is genuinely valued and working in its most potent form, then *equity and community are one in the same*.

Since education can only occur *in relation to* something and with others, education in essence is a community act. As such, when working well, this educative act must honor both the individuals and their nested set of interpersonal relations while striving for increased competence (learning).

The nature of these relations becomes the community; hence community as process rather than as place or thing becomes paramount. Honoring individuals and interpersonal relations necessitates daily, sensitive, thorough, and painstaking time and attention to structures, behaviors, values, routines, and processes that include and exclude from moment to moment, whether implicit or explicit, intended or unintended, verbal or nonverbal.

In other words, in achieving true community belonging for *all* members, equity concerns are necessarily addressed. Where issues of equity continue to be problematic, the use of the word “community” remains superficial lip service because inequity or the failures of equity by definition denote exclusion, and exclusion negates “community” for those excluded. Could Americans be struggling in an uphill battle by focusing intently on the “academic basics” without parallel attention to the “relational basics”? The relational basics are one and the same as “community basics,” since they draw attention to those sets of relations that first, foremost, and fundamentally set the basis for the academic basics. After all, these relations are ultimately the *entry point*, *means*, and *aims* of education. To develop the hearts, minds, and bodies of students, they must engage in a series of relations to learn most effectively and efficiently. How does the quality of those relations influence the amount each student and each teacher can learn, apart and together? Consider how much of our educational debate, budgetary decisions, accountability measures and standards disrupt ongoing relations and either encourage or discourage practitioners’ abilities to focus on interpersonal relations, to ensure inclusion, in short to focus on developing hearts with minds and bodies, together.

Before venturing into the schools, a brief review of some essential historical and cultural concepts and of the research on Japanese education

will help set a context for understanding the intimate school and classroom details.

2.3 Overview of Relevant Literature

2.3a Contemporary Japanese Education

An extensive review of the literature published in English about Japanese education revealed that until the 1990s the classroom level of analysis was rarely inspected or even disclosed. Given the closed nature of Japanese schools and classrooms and the limited access accorded Japanese and foreign researchers, the existence of such a large information gap is not surprising. Ethnographic methods of on-site, long-term observations and interviews are critical for capturing educational growth and import at this level of analysis, and only three such studies were published: Rohlen (1983) on high schools, Singleton (1967) on a middle school, and Cummings (1980) on elementary schools. The literature of the 1980s may largely be characterized as well-grounded works based on short-term visits to classrooms, especially notable at the preschool and elementary levels (Boocock, 1989; Lewis, 1984, 1986, 1989; Peak, 1985, 1987; Tobin, 1987, 1989; White, 1987), as well as laudable studies on socialization practices and family influences, while historical, anthropological, and sociological accounts supply other disciplinary contributions. The 1990s brought a few more ethnographic accounts on middle schools (LeTendre, 2000; Fukuzawa & LeTendre, 2001), teachers (Shimahara & Sakai, 1995; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999; Okihara, 1986; Yoshida, 1999; Leestma, 1987, 1994; Kobayashi et al,, 1993; Peabody Journal, 1997) and other school influences (Stevenson & Lee, 1997; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Tsuneyoshi, 1990, 1992, 1994, 2001).

A rich and outstanding discourse on Japanese education exists within Japanese education circles; however, too few have been translated into English (see Amano, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997; Azuma, 1979, 1984, 1986, 1994; Fujita, 1978, 1989, 1991, 2000; Hatano, 1994; Horio, 1986, 1988, 1994, 1995a, b, 1996; Inagaki, 1966, 1977, 1984a, b, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1995; Kashiwagi, 1984, 2001; Miyashita, 1994; M. Sato, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1998, 1999a, b, c, 2000). In addition to the above-mentioned scholars, teachers engage in thoughtful discourse and writing: two-thirds of journal publications in Japan were by teachers (M. Sato, 1992).

Anthropological ethnographic work addresses several methodological dilemmas with Japanese classroom research. The less time spent in the same setting, the more unitary and generalized classroom descriptions become. This is not only a natural part of the information-gathering process, but two particular features of Japanese culture make this true. First, public and private spheres are distinctly demarcated. Several different pairs of words reflect these cultural distinctions: *tatemae* (public face, the way things are supposed to look and what one is supposed to say) and *honne* (the true feelings and reality; Azuma, 1986; Doi, 1991); *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside; Mannari and Befu, 1991); and *omote* (front) and *ura* (back; Lebra, 1976; Nakane, 1970; Tobin, 1991). While these concepts contain subtle differences, the main point is that awareness of these relational dimensions in each social situation is necessary to be able to act or speak in culturally appropriate ways. When the public or “outsider” dimensions of a situation are salient, the *tatemae*, *soto*, and *omote* sides are exposed. With brief classroom visits and an agenda separate from that of the participants, previous research could see only a certain side.

Second, many of the smooth teaching-learning processes rely on nonverbal communication; the ideal is to understand without being told. Harumi Befu (1971) identifies four pertinent features of Japanese cultural style: subtlety, simplicity, indirection, and suppression of verbalism. He explains, “Suppression of verbalism, indirection, and emphasis on that which is hidden and can only be intuited are well exemplified in Zen Buddhism, which virtually denies to language the role of communication of information and logical reasoning” (p. 176). Although Japanese culture and society are rapidly changing, and verbal expression, discourse, and public speaking are important in schooling, many classroom practices I observed still rely on features stemming from this kind of cultural tradition. Needless to say, long-term, repeated visits to the same classrooms were necessary to build the trust and to cultivate the senses to be able to detect the subtle, indirect aspects of cultural and educational transmission.

Another hallmark of anthropological research is uncovering the participants’ perspectives, often accessible only in an atmosphere of trust accrued with long-term contact. While believers sketch glimpses of successful outcomes and state what is important for educational success in Japan, it is not clear what it takes to secure these credentials. On the other hand, critics delight in relating horror stories of stress, nervous disorders, suicides, murders, bullying, or simply overbearing parents and robotic students, but they do not explain why 96% still advance to some form of secondary schooling and 93% of these graduate (U.S. Department of Education, 1987, p. 39), and why the majority grow up to be competent, well-adjusted citizens who maintain the status quo despite the reported severity. How much do we understand if we still cannot answer the questions: How do the students’ and teachers’ lives differ from these accounts, and what are their interpretations of the same events or statistics?

We need even more research that exposes Japanese perspectives. As Inagaki (1986) wisely cautions, “Benefits of the Japanese system can be easily acknowledged. At the same time, however, for the Japanese themselves, there is certain ambivalence about their educational process, stemming from the evident gap between the outsiders positive evaluation and the difficulties they confront as insiders” (p. 75). The contradictions between various outsider appraisals and accolades and problems felt by the Japanese themselves must be explained. Inagaki (1986) elaborates:

> The criteria for cross-cultural comparison… must be broadened to include intracultural difficulties and problems. When used by persons outside a culture, the criteria for comparison often tend to focus on the outcomes of education or its surface features rather than on the processes and the problems lying beneath the surface, (p. 89)

Indeed, most of the praise and criticisms mention practices that require long-term interaction to promote and develop, yet the anecdotes merely provide a peek at the processes that create the situation in reality. For example, social cohesion, cooperative workgroups, perseverance, motivation, creativity, respect for education, academic achievement, and other outcome measures are often cited as praiseworthy features of the Japanese educational system. All these areas require daily, persistent attention and the means for achieving such results are complex. The key is how teachers and students interact in order to define learning tasks and accomplish their learning goals. And along the road to success, many obstacles and opportunities for breakdown must crop up, but what these are and how the Japanese handle these breakdowns or failures needs to be clarified.

2.3b History and Organization of Japanese Schooling

The history, structure, and organization of Japanese education and schooling are well documented in several ways. The Ministry of Education

publishes many wonderful documents containing statistical information and a description of the prescribed structure, organization, and content of school programs (Ministry of Education, 1980, 1983, 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 2000). The TIMSS study provides comparative test score data along with more on-site case study research. From a historical perspective, Beauchamp (1976, 1989, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998) Dore (1965), OERI (1998), Passin (1965), Reischauer (1977), and Rubinger (1982, 1986) are quite informative. Yet we could benefit tremendously from translations of the educational writings of Japanese scholars, especially Azuma, Inagaki, and M. Sato, and on the sociological policy side, the writings of Amano, Fujita, and Horio.

Three historical developments contribute to our understanding of contemporary Japanese education. The first is that the importance of literacy, reading, and book learning has been prominent since the 19th century in Japan. In feudal times, literacy increased such that 45% of the men and 15% of the women were literate by 1850, which is comparable to what most Western nations had at the time (Reischauer, 1977). Dore (1965) also reports widespread literacy at the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and describes

> a world in which books abounded…. Works of scholarship now accounted for only a small part of the total output. There were story books for children, illustrated books, technical books, popular medical books, pornographic books, travel guides, novels, poems, collections of sermons; and they were bought… not simply by the samurai, but also, or even chiefly, by members of other classes. By this time the majority of town-dwellers… and a good proportion of the farmers… were literate. Even illiterate parents sent their children in increasing numbers to schools…. It was a society which now depended on the written word for its efficient operation, (pp. 2–3)

Second, several authors (Befu, 1971; Dore, 1965; Reischauer, 1977) point out the absence of an anti-intellectual sentiment along with the presence of a strong egalitarian sentiment that promoted universal education. As a

result, virtual universal elementary education attendance was attained by 1907 (Reischauer, 1977). Compared to the rigid, hierarchical class society of ancient times, 1873 marked the first year of the modern school system, signaling a breakdown of the feudal class structure. Education became the "new escalator" for achievement and mobility, but Passin (1965) adds, "In principle, complete equality of educational opportunity was established from 1872 onward. In practice, however, the various segments of the population were differentially prepared, sometimes financially and sometimes culturally, to take advantage of it" (p. 117). He points to school attendance figures, attainment levels, and financial difficulties as evidence that the traditionally educated classes were still favored under this system.

The third major development occurred after World War II with the Occupation. The Japanese school system was restructured and modeled on the American system: a 6–3–3–4 system was adopted making schooling compulsory through ninth grade (Passin, 1965; Inagaki, 1986). Content changed to correspond roughly to subject matters taught in the United States, but the major thrust of Occupational reforms was to eliminate any militaristic, ultranationalistic elements from the curriculum (Passin, 1965). As Reischauer and Befu note, compared to the prewar elitist and sexist education, postwar Japanese schools became coeducational and public.

The new "ladder of success" (Passin, 1965) brought forth a different set of problems, most notably an increasing pressure to succeed in the examination system. Many authors (Befu, 1971; Cummings et al., 1986; Finkelstein, Imamura, & Tobin, 1991; Rohlen, 1977, 1980; Shields, 1989) document various difficulties—namely, examination hell, education "moms," *juku*, and increased stratification. Problems generated by a labor market determined solely by degree status and university prestige are well documented in works by Horio (1988), Fujita (1978), and Dore (1976). M.

Sato has significantly added to our understanding of Japanese classroom management and educational reforms in his accounts recently published in English (1998, 1999).

2.3c Japanese Cultural Context

Because education is intimately linked with cultural transmission (Spindler, 1974), examining classroom processes along with an understanding of Japanese culture is critical. Rooted in wholly different traditions, conceptions of self and society, and value orientations, explanations of educational processes must reveal significance and intentions ascertained within the Japanese context. For example, the study conducted by Hess, et al. (1980) highlights important differences in maternal behaviors also found by Lewis (1984) in her description of how cooperation and control are established in nursery schools. In other words, Japanese mothers and nursery school teachers rely less on authority and more on patient, persistent explanations that will lead the child to eventual understanding. The difference in patterns of control and expectations has important implications for conducting learning activities. Lewis and Tsuchida (1998) reinforce this argument in their analysis of classroom teaching, student responsibility, and learning in elementary classrooms.

In another example, Smith (1983) underscores the different notion of self in Japanese society stemming from Eastern traditions. Befu (1986) delineates the term *personhood,* which more accurately reflects the Japanese definition of self. This term has three dimensions: interpersonalism, self-discipline, and role perfectionism. As opposed to the Western conception of self as an individual independent of others, interpersonalism involves ones definition of self in terms of one's web of relationships with others. Befu explains that interpersonalism is characterized by particularism (a notion of self that changes depending on

the situation, especially with whom one is interacting), mutuality of trust, and interdependence. Importantly, “it is the interconnectedness of persons and the quality of this interconnectedness that determines who one is. Connectedness is not merely a matter of knowing someone; it also expresses moral commitment to reciprocal support” (Befu, 1986, p. 23).

Self-discipline, the quality of ones character, is also inextricably woven into the concept of self. Several complex terms refer to the essence of this character—*ki, kokoro, tamashii,* and *seishin*—all of which have no simple direct translation (Rohlen, 1976) but in combination refer to a positive mental attitude, “vitality to live,” a “sympathetic and empathetic soul,” and the “determination to overcome all odds” (Befu, 1986, p. 24). Self-discipline must be molded through experience, which involves “hardship (*kuro*), endurance (*gaman, nintai, shimbo, gambaru*), effort (*doryoku*), and the utmost self-exertion (*isshokemmei*)” (Befu, 1986, p. 24). Role perfectionism accompanies the latter idea—that is, valuing a commitment to perform ones role to the best of ones ability despite all odds. Rohlen (1998) aptly describes these notions in his description of character building (*seishin kyoikuy* spiritual education) at a bank training institute. Certain values recur in the elementary setting as well, such as *kokoro*, emphases on nonverbal forms, enduring hardships, integration of mind-body-spirit, and reflection toward self-improvement and socialization.

As mentioned at the outset, developing *kokoro* (heart) is the ultimate goal of student learning and development. *Kokoro* encompasses spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical heart. Dore (1965) notes this distinction in Tokugawa (1600–1868) educational philosophers’ descriptions of the ideal man: “He is born with a heart (or mind, the word, *kokoro*, refers to a centre both of cognition and emotion)” (p. 35).

Dore also points out that the word *education* tends to be equated with schooling in the Western world, and also increasingly in Japan since the 18th century. However, in the Tokugawa period, a variety of other words, all meaning *education*, were used. Emphases could include moral attitudes, intellectual capacity, techniques, knowledge, and artistic and physical attitudes and skills (Dore, 1965, p. 34). Although Dore is correct that not as many words for education are used in contemporary Japanese discourse, significantly I found that the elementary school curriculum still contained these diverse emphases.

Understanding general cultural values and how they influence educational processes, as well as understanding how children learn these cultural values through educational processes, is vital for appropriately interpreting classroom behaviors and conversations. With a contrasting notion of self, perhaps a contrasting notion of equity also exists. For instance, do teachers strive for equity or do they strive for homogeneity? The former has individual connotations in the American context, while the latter has connotations of the concept of self as defined by one's relationship to others. Do school days and classroom life assume different forms with a more inclusive conception of cognition and broader emphases for education? A contradiction between a more generous conception of goals and purposes at the elementary level and a pressure to succeed on examinations of narrowly defined knowledge and skills becomes evident. Where and how does the contradiction become acknowledged, confronted, and/or resolved and with what ramifications?

Several articles in Stevenson, Azuma, and Hakuta (1986) clarify various Japanese cultural values, including the notion of an *ii ko* (good child) that reveals the valued personality traits and expectations placed by adults on children (White & LeVine, 1986), such as "gentle," "compliant," and

“energetic” (p. 56). They point out the limitations inherent in translating concepts across languages, and they underscore the need to alertly attend to “how Japanese parents, teachers, and children categorize the means and ends of child development” (p. 55). *Inside Japanese Classrooms* begins to chart how they categorize the means and ends of education and schooling in order to foster the goals of equality of educational opportunity espoused in their constitution, educational policies, and public discourse.

The primary goal is to capture the import of teaching-learning processes from the participants’ points of view, maintaining their integrity in the Japanese context. Therefore, instead of entering the field with predetermined measures, themes emerged in the process of conducting this research. The conceptual framework proved to be relevant and useful in the Japanese case, but the most prominent realization was the interconnectedness of the educational processes, structures, and actors. Realizing that each teaching-learning situation is located within nested layers of broader contexts, such as classroom, school, community, society, and culture, even though the latter were not the primary focus of the dissertation research, relevant data are cited where applicable.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The methodology and conceptual framework guiding the dissertation research viewed students and teachers as active agents, accounted for cultural elements, and examined equity issues in the daily interactions between students and teachers. Attention to maximizing participation in teaching-learning experiences, along with attention to the quality of those relationships and interactions, is an important determinant of equity. Equity depends on optimizing student learning experiences—that is, providing the most effective educational opportunities to develop and receive credit for a range of skills and abilities for the greatest number of students.

The conceptual framework guiding data collection and analysis was purposefully multidisciplinary to capture the broadest context possible. The focal point is the teaching-learning situation. Reduced to its most basic elements, each teaching-learning situation involves a person or people (social forms) acquiring some kind of knowledge, content, or skills (intellectual forms) expressed through some medium (representational forms). To investigate potential sources of inequity, my conceptual framework focused on these areas (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Teaching-Learning Situations in Classrooms

Actors	**Content**	**Medium**
Social Forms	**Intellectual Forms**	**Representational Forms**
Grouping patterns	Linguistic	Words
Micropolitics	Musical	Music—listen; perform
Feedback	Bodily-kinesthetic	Dance, sports
Reward structures	Spatial	Painting, designing
Scaffolding	Logical-mathematical	Numbers, words
Norms	Personal	People interactions
Authority/control		
	Distributed intelligence	(Note: representational forms correspond to different sensory systems: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, gustatory/olfactory)
	Nurturing intelligence	
	Humanizing intelligence	

Briefly explained, social forms consist of the interaction between actors in a setting. In classrooms, social relations and seating patterns influence the nature of the learning situation for each student. Drawing from sociology of

education literature, one working hypothesis is that varied classroom organization patterns, in terms of teacher-centered and teacher-delegated authority, whole-group and small-group activities, and competitive and cooperative norms, will increase student participation and involvement in learning activities. For instance, sociological research on instruction and learning has uncovered a host of variables that can affect student effort, participation, intergroup relations, and eventual achievement: the types of rewards, amount and kind of feedback, the way students are grouped, the nature of the task assigned, cooperative vs. competitive norms, types of authority, and status expectations (Cohen, 1984, 1986, 1994). Given this complexity at the classroom level, reforms such as lengthening the school year remain superficial because classroom structure and processes are ignored. Thus, if the kinds of student work arrangements, tasks, and rewards are diversified in instructional practices, then increased participation may result.

Intellectual forms correspond to areas of intellectual competencies postulated by Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1983). Basically individuals have varying degrees of strengths in each area: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and personal. A second working hypothesis is that predominance of any area in educational programs will encourage a hierarchy favoring students with strengths in the prevailing area. A more balanced repertoire of areas optimizes participation opportunities for more students.

In "Intelligence in Seven Steps" (1990), Gardner categorizes developments in Western thinking about intelligence in the 1900s into seven steps: (1) lay conceptions (preintelligence testing); (2) the scientific turn (intelligence tests); (3) pluralization of intelligence (beyond the singular notion of intelligence); (4) contextualization; (5) intelligence as distributed;

(6) nurturance of intelligence; and (7) humanizing intelligence. In an interesting twist, steps 5, 6, and 7 closely parallel the most educationally stimulating aspects of the Japanese classrooms observed in this study.

Gardner's step 5 pursues the idea of intelligence as a distributed phenomenon, not as an entity situated solely within an individual. In other words, it is "located in the artifacts with which individuals work, and on which they come to depend in their productive work" (p. 4). He continues, "However, it is also appropriate to think of other individuals as part of one's distributed intelligence" (p. 4). Most work environments depend on this distributed intelligence to accomplish tasks and goals. This notion is critical for many reforms that promote cooperative learning, and it is central to Brown and Campione's notion of distributed expertise (Brown et al., 1993) evidenced in their reform work.[3] Cohen's (1986, 1994) "Complex Instruction" takes advantage of this notion but in a more purposeful way in order to deliberately distribute knowledge to students to alleviate status differences that often inhibit equitable classroom learning.

Steps 6 and 7 represent areas for future research. Although they do not reconceptualize intelligence as the first five steps do, they concentrate on how to nurture it and how to steer it toward morally responsible ends. In step 7, Gardner suggests synthesizing the notions of intellect and intelligence with other human features such as motivation, personality, emotions, and will to create a new view of human nature and human beings. These features tend to be restricted to areas distinct from intelligence in Western thought. Nonetheless, based on my initial findings in Japanese elementary classrooms, the seventh step may also lead to another reconceptualization of intelligence: one that would synthesize those aspects now treated as separate "aspects of human being." Combining emotion, body, and intellect as integral features of intelligence has powerful

implications for the nurturing of intelligence and what that looks and feels like in classrooms, as demonstrated in these Japanese classrooms. Noddings (1986, 1992, 2002) nicely elaborates the notion of caring as essential to education, important to humanizing intelligence.

Japanese teachers and students rely heavily on distributed intelligence to nurture all students' intelligence; they believe the nurturance of intelligence must happen in a variety of settings and cannot be severed from emotions, personality, will, effort, motivation, and moral dimensions. Important Japanese middle school work (LeTendre, 2000; Fukuzawa & LeTendre, 2001) documents similar emphases. Since the Japanese conception of intelligence and cognition appears to already incorporate these features into their aims of education, their school environment maybe a rich case for elaborating Gardner's proposed steps.

Translated into the practitioner's world, what are the means for capitalizing on distributed intelligence, nurturance of intelligence, and humanizing intelligence to foster educational growth, achievement, and development in all students? A third working hypothesis is that educational programs that have more articulated, systematic, and diverse ways for augmenting distributed intelligence and for nurturing and humanizing intelligence will encourage educational equity in more humane and generous ways.

Eisner (1982) explains how representational forms provide the specific means and formats through which cognitive competencies are made public. For instance, linguistic competency is conveyed through oral and written forms; and dance is one form of representation of bodily-kinesthetic competence. While intellectual and representational forms do not have perfect one-to-one correspondence, they parallel one another nicely because both are biologically rooted in our sensory apparatus. The fourth working

hypothesis is that a broad, flexible curriculum that develops the whole person and all one's sensory modalities is more responsive to equity concerns. In addition, if student assessment includes a wide range of information derived from a variety of sources, then less status differentiation may occur, and more students may receive feedback and be included in the classroom definition of who is "smart."

Eisner advocates for a broader view of cognition: "school programs that neglect developing the child's literacy in forms of representation that sharpen the senses ultimately deprive the student of the very content he needs to use well the skills of reading and writing" (1982, p. 77). Even though the "senses" refer to biologically rooted senses (sight, smell, taste, hearing, and touch), I would add the senses of emotion, will, motivation, personality, and morality discussed above.

Increasing the variety of forms of representation and expanding on our concept of cognition contributes significantly to educational equity. As Eisner (1982) says,

> Equity of educational opportunity cannot be provided if some children are not given the chance to use and develop their most potent intellectual abilities. By diversifying the forms of representation that are made available… we might be able to expand the success that some children achieve in school to those who now find schools places in which only particular, limited varieties of human ability count, (p. 80)

Considering research on critical periods of development, perhaps the elementary level is a crucial time to develop a variety of skills that strengthen all sensory modes. The Japanese elementary curriculum has diverse music, art, and physical education programs.

> It is commonly understood that those Japanese who attend… school in… American suburbs will be… behind their grade level in mathematics and natural sciences when they return to Japan. The same is true even for the physical education skills…. Lest it be assumed that music and artistic skills in Japan are neglected, William K. Cummings… comments as

> follows…: “By the sixth grade, most students are able to switch readily between at least three different instruments. The first time I saw this level of achievement, I could not believe my eyes. But after the fifth primary school, I had to recognize that it was widespread…. Comparisons in art are nearly as dramatic.” (Vogel, 1979, p. 160)

Many questions arise: How do music, physical education, and art programs fit into their conception of cognition? How much are various sensory modalities used in learning activities? What outside-school activities support the development of these skills?

Cummings (1980) also notes variety in instructional grouping patterns:

> One discovers that most Japanese teachers do make significant departures from the traditional approach… for example… the extensive reliance on subgroups, both for education and for other school tasks. Indeed, the subgroup structure is often so complex that one wonders how the children can keep up with it. (pp. 125–126)

Couched in research on cooperative learning, many issues are addressed: How often and what kinds of grouping patterns are used? How are norms and roles established in the classroom to promote such complexity in practice? What status variables are at work? What practices mitigate the effects of status differences to promote “equality”?

Landmark research by Cole, Lave, and others (Cole, Gay, Glick, & Sharp, 1971; Cole & Bruner, 1971; Cole & Traupmann, 1979; Cole & Scribner, 1973, 1974; Lave, 1988; Lave, Murtaugh, & de la Rocha, 1984; Lave & Wenger, 1991) has demonstrated the situation-specific and culture-specific nature of cognition and performance on learning tasks. Contrary to the longstanding psychological notion of cognition as a fixed entity composed of constituent parts measurable in a laboratory context, Cole et al. (1971) argue that cultural differences in learning and in problem solving reside in the situations to which people apply cognitive skills rather than in the individuals themselves. Every learning task is socially constituted: people construct each task for themselves, in relation to its use and purpose,

in relation to others in the setting, and in relation to the physical forms through which the task is presented.

In their 1973 study, Cole and Scribner make a significant distinction between the narrower set of abilities developed in schools, which correspond to those tested in traditional testing procedures, and overall cognitive competence (which the tests purport to test). One important implication is that schools develop students' abilities to display knowledge in a testing situation rather than generalized ability. Erickson (1984) points out the critical importance of this reformulation, which constitutes a "fundamentally different notion of the relations between an individual's intellectual capabilities and the specific material and social situations in which those capabilities are employed" (p. 529). In practical terms, conceiving the learning task as a social situation focuses attention both on the social forms and on the physical forms through which it occurs. As Erickson asserts, "change the physical form of the tools or symbols, or change the social forms of relations among the people with whom the individual is learning the practice… and one has profoundly changed the nature of the interaction—the nature of the learning task" (p. 529).

Lave, Murtaugh, and de la Rocha (1984) support this idea with a fascinating study on "The Dialectic of Arithmetic in Grocery Shopping." Briefly, adults who averaged 59% on a paper-and-pencil arithmetic test performed "a startling 98%—virtually error free—arithmetic in the supermarket" (p. 82). After tracing the possible sources for such a stark contrast in scores, the authors suggest two possibilities: (1) arithmetic in context is less linear and involves "gap-closing, dialectically constituted, arithmetic procedures" (p. 92) that occur in stages, actually a cyclical mode of computational thought; and (2) the "context of an activity and the activity in context" (pp. 92–93) are important components of the cognitive

act of arithmetic. This study reveals the “integral nature of activity in relation with context and the mutual interdependence of mental and physical activity” (p. 68). Since these studies, Rogoff (1990, 1994, 2000, 2003), Rogoff et al. (1984, 1993, 1996, 2001), Lave and Wenger (1991), and others have extended research on the role of collaboration as part of the learning process.

Learning content and skills in an appropriate context along with opportunities to apply knowledge and skills in practice should expand access to learning activities. It stands to reason that if classroom organization patterns and the forms through which subject matter content is conveyed remain the same, then certain students will be favored more than others. Conversely, diverse physical and social forms of learning tasks provide access to a greater number of students along with more opportunities to demonstrate their diverse competencies. In order to better understand the processes by which equal or unequal distribution of knowledge and skills in society is produced, we need further insights into teaching and learning as social transactions, as a collective enterprise between students, teachers, society, and culture.

The Japanese case is a rich resource for investigating the above conceptual framework. In sum, this study focused on social, intellectual, and representational forms and how these facets contribute to equal or unequal distribution of knowledge and skills—in effect, educational equity.[4] The interdependence of the three forms and their mutual reinforcement within nested layers of broader contexts appear to be indispensable to the successful totality of the results as demonstrated in the following in-depth description of daily school life. Keep in mind the fundamental importance of the relational or community basics, which rest on a relentless pursuit of

the four Cs, founded upon the five *K*s, *ka-ki-ku-ke-ko* (relationships, emotions, hardship, experience, and heart).

2.5 Research Methodology—Revelations About Japanese Schooling

This study purposefully selected fifth-sixth-grade classrooms in two Tokyo public schools with highly contrasting socioeconomic backgrounds (one upper-class, *yamanote* school and one lower-class, *shitamachi* school).[5] The schools (Umi and Mori,[6] respectively) also differ dramatically in educational attainment expectations. Umi students are college bound, and most prepare for examinations into elite middle schools so that their chances for entering elite universities will be greater. Mori students are not necessarily college bound, and most graduate to the local public middle school. Contrasts along these dimensions were deliberately sought in order to detect possible differences in classroom organization and in teaching-learning processes.

Classroom research was conducted from April 1987 to April 1989, but most of the data for this book centered on an intensive daily observation period from November 1987 through August 1988 at Umi and Mori. Most Umi observations were with Mr. Seki's class, and Mori observations were predominantly with Mr. Ito's class. Since the primary goal of the research was to record daily life as the students actually experience it and to secure as natural a look at the setting as possible, I attended school with the same students Monday through Saturday, 8:00 a.m. until the students went home everyday (about 3 to 4:00 p.m.[7] on weekdays and noon to 1 p.m. on Saturday). Basically, I followed the students wherever they went and observed all their activities and subject matters, including cleaning and work times, recesses, special ceremonies, events, and field trips. To ensure the least disruption, I went to each school for 2 straight weeks before

switching back to the other school. Because the school year ends in March and a new year begins in April, the fifth graders I observed in November through March became sixth graders for the remainder of the observation period.

The Japanese school year is 240 days long, divided into three trimesters (see Appendix A). The first ends with a 6-week summer vacation; the second ends with a 2-week break for the New Year; and there are just 2 weeks between the last trimester and the beginning of a new school year.[8] Unlike U.S. school vacations where teachers and students are on their own time and have no teaching-learning responsibilities together, Japanese students and teachers jointly plan vacation schedules, and they have homework. A parent-student-teacher contract for daily student schedules is signed. Over the long summer break, they have days when they must attend school, and they have swimming lessons for half of the 6-week vacation time.[9] Swimming is taught by the regular classroom teachers and specialist teachers—for example, music, art, home economics, or health teachers. Thus, even though I was looking forward to free time, I observed school-related activities through the first 2 weeks of August. Even the word *vacation* assumes a new meaning in a different cultural context!

This alone is an excellent example of connectedness: summer as an extension of the school year, home-school connectedness, whole-person education necessitating student responsibilities throughout the year and the corresponding comprehensive responsibilities of teachers, beyond academics, and the interdependence of all staff (homeroom teachers and specialists) to teach swimming and meet with students over the so-called vacation.

Each school handles the summer days differently. In some schools, everyone reports to class 1 or 2 days, and teachers explained that they may

look over homework, assess student progress on summer projects, and most importantly, talk with students to find out how they are doing. Mori students do not have 1 day to report to school, and instead they spend one class period before vacation planning summer study, play, and neighborhood cleaning times with their *tokohan* (walk-to-school groups).[10] Sixth graders are responsible for organizing and running these times, so I observed those led by Mr. Ito's students in the first 2 weeks of August. Because most Umi students are sent to *juku* summer sessions to study intensively for middle school entrance examinations, their school arranges no school days other than the required swimming instruction. Thus, my August observations were with Mori students and not with Umi students.[11]

After the initial 10-month period of in-depth classroom observation research, I spent an additional year conducting research in areas outside Tokyo and following up my research at Mori and Umi: conducting periodic observations, interviewing principals, teachers, parents, and students, visiting homes with students and their families, and visiting after-school educational and recreational activities of targeted students. I was fortunate to be able to attend the 3-day "outdoor classroom" with Mori students and teachers, and even spent 1 night in a room with six classmates.[12]

Research sites outside Tokyo were selected for diversity: two public schools in Nagano (one rural town and one isolated mountain school[13]) and two minority[14] public schools in Osaka. A similar research strategy was employed in Nagano and Osaka, but the daily observation period was shortened to 2 to 4 weeks. Parallel grade levels were observed: fifth grade (November 1988–February 1989) and sixth grade in April 1989. Brief visits to other classrooms furnished a perspective on the two Tokyo schools.[15]

My research assesses classroom and school organization, education goals, teaching methods and philosophies, curriculum content, learning

activities, tests, grades, other evaluation structures, classroom management strategies, student grouping patterns, social relations, as well as student and parent attitudes and expectations, which set a vital context for learning.

Although my original research strategy was only through March, two findings immediately stood out to motivate extending this daily research strategy. One finding is that very few days follow the class schedule posted on the classroom wall because the school year is replete with ceremonies and special events that require practice and planning. Further, these extra events and duties are so much a part of the assumed calendar that teachers rarely warned me about these detours from the regular plan. I found I had to be there each day to discover each new event and the way it was accommodated into the class schedule.[16] All those comfortable, easily attainable statistics about the numbers of hours spent on various subject matters are in print only, but at least it was an enjoyable redefinition of their true meaning. Every week was so interesting in its discoveries, I eagerly attended the same classrooms every day for as long as I could.

The second finding is that fifth-sixth-grade students are responsible for many school and classroom management duties that adults normally handle in the United States (e.g., taking attendance, equipment maintenance, discipline, class meetings, self-study periods, student activities, and serving lunch, to name a few). In order to observe how teachers develop this sense of responsibility and train students in operating procedures, and how students are assigned to and organize these activities, I wanted to observe the beginning of a new school year. Mr. Toyota and a teacher I had befriended at Mori, Mrs. Fujita, both became first-grade teachers, so I was fortunate to be able to observe first graders 2 days each month to see how they are initiated into complex grouping patterns, leadership roles, and systems of responsibility.

By March, the comfort and trust level between myself as researcher and the school administrators, teachers, and students had grown, so I could request the research extension (through August and beyond) without resistance. I also became familiar enough to schedule home visits, interview parents, and arrange excursions to after school activities of selected students.

Prior to classroom observation, the first level of data collection was obtaining an overview of the setting: mapping and photographing the neighborhood and school, obtaining school and class schedules, and reading the school brochure. The most informative document is the school brochure, published annually, which contains a map of its residential purview, map of the school building and size of each area, staff list and jobs (home addresses and phone numbers in some cases), student population data by family, sex, and grade level, school administration and an organizational chart, explanations of assigned duties for the year (e.g., student councils, events coordinators, committees), school history, philosophy, school song, and a school calendar listing all meetings and events for the year. The brochure also explains the PTA organization and structure, community relations, emergency procedures, educational goals and plans including lists of goals and aims for each week, month, and for the year, textbook descriptions, and details about special activities, festivals, health, nutrition, safety, subject matters, and life guidance (*seikatsu shido*)[17] goals, plans, and activities.

This brochure alone points to an outstanding way to promote connectedness and community for parents, staff, and other community members, and as an outside researcher it was an invaluable tool. The range of activities and responsibilities is beyond any delineated in U.S. schools I have known, and as a published brochure available to anyone, it is quite telling about the “standardized” nature of this organizational structure as

well as the all-encompassing nature of school and its place in a child's life, let alone its place in the entire community: a web of interacting obligations and opportunities. Imagine being a new parent and student entering the school: it enables parents to support school goals and organization patterns, while it obligates their connectedness in the information provided. This document's format captures standard organizational patterns, which along with other standardized forms throughout Japanese schooling, help to create a communal bond across regions. Such standardization serves as a comprehensive, well-informed entrance into a new community: a comforting map establishing one's place and enabling a smooth transition. Remember the Japanese learning tenets: "entering through form" and teaching without teaching.

Besides close, interdependent work groups (whether desired or not) and responsibilities shared with other grade levels and specialists, grade-level teachers form an even closer, cooperative working unit within each school. These groups can be closely knit partners and work well together, or they can be mismatched, and though they must still work together daily, the conflicts quietly seethe beneath the surface. At Umi and Mori, the fifth-sixth-grade teachers worked well together with interestingly opposite results. The two fifth-grade Mori teachers worked so well together that they agreed to follow their own individual styles, establish their own pace, and supplement the curriculum in their own manner. Meanwhile, the Umi teachers worked so well together that they shared and implemented the same curriculum. I suspect that this in part stems from the schools way of operating and complements its formal style, but it also results from competitive parental and student pressures. If one classroom receives different materials or information than another, parents and students will complain. Such inequality may have bearing on future entrance

examination performance, so teachers at Umi feel increased pressures to present the exact same materials and to stay close to the prescribed curriculum. Most teachers whom I interviewed resent the curricular restrictions imposed on them by the examination system and its impact on students.

The teacher work context deserves more extensive, deliberate coverage, and recent researchers have added valuable details (Inagaki & Kudomi, 1994; Kobayashi, et al., 1993; Shimahara & Sakai, 1995; M. Sato et al., 1990; N. Sato & McLaughlin, 1992; Yang, 1994). I will just highlight some noticeable elements as observed in my daily research strategy. During the first weeks, every morning before classes began, during morning and lunch recesses,[18] and after school, I socialized in the teachers' room. I spent this time with Mr. Ito, Mr. Seki, and their fellow grade-level teachers to develop mutual rapport, define my role as researcher, and refine my understanding of the least obtrusive and most helpful means of conducting research. Partly out of respect for cultural forms of communication and partly out of respect for the teachers' incredibly busy work demands, rather than rely on constant verbal communication, I needed to hang around in order to learn how to sense when and what was needed, how to sense receptivity to the research, how to sense when requests could be made properly, and how to probe innumerable questions in a sensitive, quiet, yet timely fashion. Much of what I learned needed to be absorbed, much like an apprenticeship. In fact, their most powerful professional development and teacher induction occurs through "absorption" as their physical context and organizational requirements necessitate learning from one another whether intended or not, whether preferred or not.

Each morning before classes begin, teachers gather at their desks, which are grouped by grade level in the teachers' room. They tend to

administrative tasks, prepare for the school day, discuss issues and problems, socialize, joke and tease one another, and jointly plan upcoming events. From about 8:30 to 8:45, a formal teacher meeting is conducted; without adult supervision, students are responsible for outside exercise regimens or self-study periods in their homerooms. Once I sensed everyone was comfortable with the research mode and my presence (after 2 to 3 weeks), I skipped teacher meetings and breaks in order to wander the halls with students and to observe their activities and behaviors during these unsupervised times. These moments also were crucial for eliciting numerous informal interviews with students, often securing different opinions of the same event. Throughout the research period, I attended special parent and teacher meetings after major events, socialized with teachers on Saturday afternoons, and attended teacher in-service workshops. Since my primary focus was the daily student experience, I did not attend monthly teacher/staff meetings, and these were closed sessions.[19] I was able to meet parents on one field trip occasion, at special events, and on parent visitation days, before distributing parent questionnaires and interviewing parents. This face-to-face contact helped to solicit volunteers for interviews and home visits and to encourage questionnaire response.

Lets proceed into these neighborhoods and schools as I did on my first days of research, appreciating the first impressions that set the context and ultimately serve as the overarching framework that circumscribes the heart of Japanese educational processes.

Notes

1. The Ministry of Education approves textbooks published by private publishers. Each school district then selects from the approved

textbooks. Umi and Mori used different textbooks in every subject except art.

2. These categories of curriculum come from Stephen J. Thornton (1988). He distinguishes between the intended curriculum (what teachers plan to teach), the operational curriculum (what actually transpires in the classroom), and the experienced curriculum (what students learn). The difference between intended, operational, and experienced are nice distinctions not only for curriculum but for all areas of school life.
3. See Brown and Campione's writings (Brown et al., eds. 1990, 1993, 1999) about Fostering a Community of Learners (FCL) and J. Bruer (1993) Schools for Thought, which combined FCL with Vanderbilt's Jasper program (Cognition and Technology Group 1997) and Toronto's CSILE (Computer Simulated Interactive Learning Environment) program.
4. See N. Sato (1991) for a review of literature that informed the original dissertation research.
5. The terms *yamanote* and *shitamachi* are well known to all Tokyoites (maybe to all Japanese) and encompass a host of meanings not easily translated into English. The words *upper class* and *lower class* are the closest English terms that I assign, but the reader should be aware that the terms and connotations associated with socioeconomic class distinctions in the United States are not readily transferable to the Japanese case. They have a whole nexus of other connotations, and *class* operates in different ways.

   According to laypersons I quizzed about the meaning of the terms, some differences included those from a *yamanote* area would tend to be wealthier, to live in nicer, more private (e.g., fenced-in) dwellings, to be college graduates with professional, managerial jobs, to pay more

attention to social forms of politeness and decorum, to be more formal and perhaps more sophisticated and cosmopolitan, while those from a *shitamachi* area would tend to be poorer, to live in more simple, open (e.g., no fences between units) dwellings, to have a range of education attainment levels (elementary through college), to work in service, factory, or technical occupations, to be polite but also more frank and informal, and perhaps more traditional and down to earth. Although my casual definition of these terms may not be entirely correct, one fact stood out: every time I mentioned the two neighborhoods in the same sentence, all Japanese and foreigners familiar with Tokyo would exclaim, "Oh my, such different schools" or "Oh, quite a difference, *yamanote* and *shitamachi*, isn't there?" And when quizzed about what those differences were, most would not be able to describe the differences succinctly.

For further information, readers may consult Bestor (1989), an ethnography of a *shitamachi* neighborhood, and Dore (1958).

6. All the names used in this dissertation are fictitious in order to respect the rights to privacy for research participants. Japanese names are used to preserve that level of cultural consonance. No other symbolism or meanings are intended. Names are randomly selected but remain consistently referenced.
7. Upper elementary students have extracurricular activities and thus longer school days than younger students. The schedule reported here is that of the fifth-sixth grades I observed. Sometimes activities lasted until 5:30 p.m.
8. The trimesters are scheduled approximately as follows: April 6–7 to July 20–21, September 1 to December 25, and January 8 to March 24–25, the most important day, graduation ceremony.

9. Even though summer vacation officially begins around July 21, all schools are supposed to have swimming instruction during vacation days. Most schools have pools, but those schools without access to a swimming facility are exempt from this requirement. Tokyo schools sponsor swimming instruction all of July and part of August.
10. These are multiaged groups based on residence, led by an elected sixth grader. Students decide a regular gathering time and place, then walk to school together as a safety measure. The idea of summer study, cleaning, and playtimes based on these groups intrigued me, so I solicited approval from parents to attend sessions in their homes.
11. See "Methodological Appendix" (N. Sato, 1991) for more details.
12. The sixth-grade "outdoor classroom" is one of the highlights of the Japanese elementary school experience. Fifth graders also go on a separate 2-day outing, no doubt in preparation for their sixth-grade trip. For many, this is the first night spent away from their families, especially from their mothers.
13. Only 37 students attended this school, 6 students in the sixth grade I observed.
14. Contrary to what the government and general Japanese populace may like foreigners to think regarding their "homogeneous" population, there are significant minority groups in Japan struggling to end discrimination, to gain equal access to Japanese society, to defend their rights, and to secure their human dignity. Befu (1971) gives a good overview of four main groups: *burakumin, hibakusha* (atomic bomb victims), *Ainu*, and foreigners. The latter group is divided into several nationalities, most notably Koreans and Chinese; however, increasingly other Asians and Southeast Asians are immigrating to Japan for economic reasons. Korean issues are well covered in Lee and

DeVos (1981). *Ainu* comprise the indigenous group, who, much like the Native Americans, were pushed north to harsher lands and forced into inequitable treaties by the Japanese. Their numbers are dwindling and they largely reside in Hokkaido, the northernmost island. In contrast, the *burakumin* are culturally, racially, and linguistically Japanese but became a minority caste because their occupations were considered "unclean" during the seventh to ninth centuries. Ritual impurity, such as anything associated with shedding blood, was shunned in Shinto religious beliefs. With the introduction of Buddhism and its taboos against taking animal life, occupations such as butchering, tanning leather, or making shoes were decidedly distasteful and people in those occupations were relegated to a caste status. Severe discrimination includes segregation in housing and education, difficulty obtaining employment, and strict taboos against intermarriage. Although legal equality is now accorded all groups, social prejudice remains high. The two minority schools I observed are in areas in which a predominance of *burakumin* and Korean students reside. The atomic bomb victims, a product of World War II, are subject to discrimination based on the same sense of "impurity" or "pollution" and thus have become social outcastes. Part of the sixth-grade curriculum in one of the minority schools entails visiting Hiroshima, interviewing *hibakusha*, and basing a play on their reported discrimination to complement plays about other forms of discrimination performed by other grade levels at the school's theater production day. See Hirasawa (1991).

15. As a pilot study (April 1987), I spent 4 days in a Tokyo school visiting a different classroom each day (second through fifth grades), along with their extracurricular activities and their picnic day. I accompanied

Professor Tadahiko Inagaki on a 3-day visit to one school in Izu peninsula and a week-long visit to two sixth-grade classrooms in Nagano prefecture, both observing specialized teaching and curriculum situations. I spent day-long ventures in eight schools in communities in or near Tokyo, thanks to various acquaintances, friends, and relatives. In these elementary schools, I observed all grade levels and I observed one middle school to gain perspective on the fifth-sixth-grade experience.

16. One discovery is that outside guests tend to be scheduled when detours are not expected, assuming that researchers want to see "regular" teaching. Mr. Seki later explained that he thought December would not be good because theater-day preparations interrupted subject matter teaching. Even though I missed Umi's cultural event, I observed the production of Mori's art exhibition, a theater day in Osaka, and a music festival in Nagano. Results were remarkable. The high quality across all students' work was enviable.
17. No perfect English equivalent exists, since Japanese teachers' roles and responsibilities are so much broader than those presumed for U.S. teachers (see also Inagaki & Ito, 1990, 1991). Basically, life guidance encompasses personal hygiene, self-discipline, safety, health, and daily life habits and skills.
18. Recesses last 15 to 20 minutes, just enough to sip a cup of tea and do a bit of paperwork. Teachers eat lunch in classrooms with their students.
19. These are private "insider" times when teachers can express their true feelings, air conflicts, and work out problems. My contact and connection with the fifth-sixth-grade teachers was firm, but other grade-level teachers may have felt uncomfortable with my presence at

these staff meetings. I later learned the contents of meetings at the Saturday social hour with the fifth-sixth-grade teachers.

3

School Settings, School Organization, and Teacher Work Arrangements

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Despite the fact that the school neighborhoods, facilities, and populations differ considerably, a surprising sameness in school organization and procedures was notable. Most Japanese and foreign visitors to schools in Japan will be able to read this description and notice a ring of familiarity with their own experiences.

3.1 Neighborhoods

Brooks Brothers. Issey Miyake. Ralph Lauren. Sleek fashion boutiques, young people dressed in the latest and most expensive fashions, men in business suits, women in fur coats—these are some of the people and places I pass walking down the broad avenues on my way to Umi. Closer to the school, I walk along the parking lot of a nearby apartment complex: Porche, BMW, Mercedes-Benz. If I want to stop for a cup of coffee at a cafe, it may cost as much as $5 per cup. Needless to say, Umi rests in an atypically wealthy part of Tokyo.

Pachinko [1] parlors. Factories. Convenience stores. Approaching Mori, the bus passes narrow streets lined with mom-and-pop stores containing the basic goods for daily life: appliances, shoes, clothing, home goods, liquor, fruits, and vegetables. Bordering the school are small plots of farmland and

factories: metal parts, cardboard boxes, auto parts. Most people on their way to school or work are dressed in some kind of uniform, and mothers in aprons are doing small errands on their bicycles. Houses are so close together that few parked cars are visible, but large trucks and much car traffic rumble along the main street passing near the school. Here I can conveniently stop for a breakfast special for $3 at the local restaurant. Mori's neighborhood is a typical, unassuming, old, residential area in one of the poorest sections of Tokyo.

Whereas Umi is situated in an upscale, commercial area that attracts attention and where a mix of Japanese, Western, and Asian foods and goods are available, Mori sits in an area that most of the world passes by, except for the residents for whom this area is their world: the goods and services are local, they know their neighbors, and they care for their property and each other. There is no reason any tourist would travel to Mori's district, Japanese or foreign, but many tourists and foreigners frequent the area around Umi. Television cameras roam the streets selecting people for on-the-street interviews, and a teen idol must live in one of the luxury apartments, since more than once I had to weave my way through crowds of giggling teenagers staring up at one of the buildings.

Few Mori students or parents have traveled farther than the surrounding Tokyo environs unless they have relatives in the countryside. The students' conception of America is that it is *big*. They know about Michael Jackson and Madonna (both had just completed tours through Tokyo during my research period). In response to a question to list the names of Americans, many students listed any name written in *katakana*:[2] Beethoven, Bach, Maradonna, Ben Johnson. To their credit, several did write down Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, and Carl Lewis.

Students at Umi have traveled abroad or their parents have traveled on business, because they told me about their travels to places such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Harvard/Boston, New York, Hong Kong, and Canada. When the principal introduced me to the student body on the first day of my research, he mentioned that I was a Harvard graduate and a Stanford graduate student conducting research for my dissertation. Afterward, several students asked me what the colleges were like. They mentioned how difficult it must have been to get in, then asked me what I had done to get into those universities. I was quite shocked, since I am sure that I knew nothing about college as a fifth grader, let alone any names, American or foreign. Their list of American names included Ronald Reagan, John Kennedy, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Babe Ruth, and Michael Jackson. The students were curious but polite, and kept their distance. If they saw me, as with any approaching adult, their loud voices reduced to hushed voices, and they would take the time to bow and do the proper greetings.

Meanwhile, after a similar introduction by the Mori principal, the students seemed unconcerned about my background, and instead were very curious if I knew Michael Jackson or Madonna. They crowded around, wanted to hear me speak English, and wanted to show me their school. They were amazed to see me writing in English script. These reactions were more typical of other Japanese elementary students whom I had met. No hushed voices, few if any bows, and in their greetings, they would jump up, wave their arms, and yell my name, beaming with bright, smiling faces. As the teacher suspected, when he asked if they knew any American colleges, no student had a clue. Nor did it matter, as they opened their hearts and instantly brought me into their world.

3.2 School Facilities and School Populations

Entering the schools, the vast differences in neighborhood settings disappear and similarities stand out, but the schools still differ in significant ways. Just as its neighborhood is more cosmopolitan and draws visitors from outside, Umi is known as a crossing-the-border school because students who live outside the residential boundaries use a friend's or relative's address to attend the school. Its reputation for students passing examinations into elite middle schools attracts the wider audience. Mori students, like its neighborhood, are all local and live nearby. Few outsiders make their way into Mori, sitting on the outskirts of Tokyo.

A visitor to Umi walks through a tall gate into a well-tended garden and gazes upon a large black stone monument artfully engraved with the school philosophy and school song and set amidst the plant life. Each morning a groundskeeper trims bushes or sweeps leaves off the sidewalk. A less imposing gate and a shorter fence surrounds Mori, and the little space available has as much greenery as it allows. The principal loves nature and flowers; he instituted a program whereby students plant chrysanthemums each year. Midday on several occasions, I observed the principal in his boots and work clothes tending the plants around the school yard. On the wall in the entryway, a wooden mosaic of plaques affectionately conveys the school philosophy and school song; this was the group art project contributed to the school by a previous graduating sixth-grade class, each piece carved with care by a student.

Umi's student body is almost double that of Mori's (805 Umi students, 467 Mori students), and the total school building area is almost double that of Mori: 7,115 square meters at Umi compared with 4,312 square meters at Mori. Umi is not only a much larger school, but the facilities are more modern and better quality. Umi is proud of its long history and strong

tradition: founded in 1906, it moved its operations to the countryside during the war, and a new school was built in 1981. The first floor contains a large entryway with exhibit cases on the left and umbrella racks and a receptionist room immediately to the right. The hallway beyond this area houses the teachers' room, principals office, administrative offices, and nurse's office on one side, and conference rooms across the hall. A large, paved outdoor playground extends out the back, with an oval track in the center, gymnastics bars along the back, a jungle gym on one side, and a covered pool on the far side. In addition, more outdoor play space is located on the second floor and on the rooftop. In contrast, Mori was built in 1953 as an expansion facility to house the growing baby-boom population. Although more rooms were added around the early 1970s, the original building is still used, so the general appearance is old and worn compared with Umi's facilities. The rooftop at Mori is not a paved play area like it is at Umi, but Mr. Ito uses it for impromptu activities on occasion.

Mori's facility seems to be a more typical Japanese elementary school layout: a large, concrete, three-story building situated around a playground area, with a 25-meter, six-lane swimming pool to one side. A large entryway with a small receptionist room and rows of shoe lockers[3] greet the visitor. A movable blackboard in the entryway reminds Mori students of their goal for the week—for example, "play with your friends," "carry your handkerchief," "play outside and be healthy," "keep our bathrooms clean," and "be precise in your work." Similar goals guide Umi students and are written on blackboards in classrooms, but they are not posted in the entryway. Umi does not have shoe lockers in the entryway; instead, teachers have their own private changing rooms, and students change shoes in their classrooms. Other schools have makeshift teacher changing areas

comprised of a few rows of lockers in a storage room separated by curtains so that teachers can change into their gym clothes for physical education.

The principals office, teachers' room, administrative offices, nurse's office, conference room, PTA room, kitchen, and first-grade classrooms are also commonly on the first floor. Most rooms are small and functional—just enough space to fit everyone's desk pushed together in the center of the room, leaving just enough room to walk around the edge. Classrooms are aligned off long hallways. The second, third, and fourth grades are on the second floor and the fifth and sixth grades are on the top floor. Schools have separate science lab rooms for experiments, rooms for art, music, and home economics, a library, and a gymnasium with a stage at one end. The gymnasium is used for all ceremonies, indoor physical education periods (once or twice a week for each classroom), theater productions, grade-level group activities, and any other event with a large gathering.

At Umi, the first, second, and third graders are on the second floor; the fourth, fifth, and sixth graders are on the third floor; and the specialty rooms are on the fourth floor: art, music, science, home economics, and a garden. The specialty rooms at Mori are located in the building wings, one on each floor. The garden is a small plot off to one side of the building. At Mori, each grade grows one type of crop—for instance, during my observation year, the fourth grade grew potatoes and the fifth grade grew beans. All observed schools have live animals in cages on the school playground. Mori and Umi have rabbits and chickens. Caring for the animals is done by upper-grade students.

The otherwise stark hallways are adorned with student artwork, essays, social studies projects, or calligraphy on bulletin boards located in the hallways alongside classrooms. Student gym bags stuffed with regulation gym uniforms or kits for art or calligraphy are hung on the hooks lining the

bottom of these bulletin boards. Other bulletin boards display school photographs, school news, and information, as well as photographs of current events and health posters. The latter attract attention and are quite informative about the human body, illness, preventive care, nutrition, and correct forms of behavior. As an outsider, the posters, along with the previously mentioned goals of the week, are most revealing about Japanese standards of etiquette, mores, and values. One poster shows the proper way to stand and bow, while another explains the proper posture for eating, including details for bringing the utensil to one's mouth.

Mori is more typical in its drab outside appearance, smaller rooms, plain facilities, and stark hallways, with just one small gravel playground, whereas Umi seems to be unusually new, attractive, and well equipped, with more outdoor paved playground areas, especially for an urban school. However, what school facilities lack in appearance, they make up for in colorful student personalities, vibrant student energy, resonant noise levels, and the diversity of activities that invigorate the school day and year.

3.3 School and Classroom Organization

The school is headed by a principal, vice principal, and homeroom teachers assigned by grade level and responsible for teaching all subjects (unless specialist teachers are hired): language, science, social studies, math, moral education, physical education, calligraphy, art, music, and home economics (only fifth-sixth grades). Each school has a full-time nurse/health teacher and usually at least one specialist teacher who teaches his or her specialty subject: either art, music, home economics, science, or social studies. Mori had art and music teachers but no home economics teacher until the sixth-grade observation time. Umi had art, music, and home economics teachers for the entire observation period. According to one specialist teacher, Tokyo

tends to have more specialists per school than other areas. Most schools only have one specialist teacher.

The support staff also play important roles in the school family: office workers, accountants, groundskeepers (janitors), security, and kitchen crew. They attend ceremonies with the teachers and building administrators and jointly participate in other special events. For example, at the Sports Day, the teachers, staff, and building administrators run their own relay, as do the parents in a separate event. Similarly, at the Mori art exhibition, teachers, staff, and parents contribute their own handmade objects. The first social studies lessons for first graders consist of learning about the school community: what jobs people around them do, where and how they work, and the value of their jobs.

Students are divided into individual classrooms and assigned to one teacher per class (averaging 30 to 40 students in the schools I observed). The school day (Monday through Saturday)[4] is officially divided into six periods of about 45 minutes each, except Saturday and Wednesday, which have four periods (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2). Between instructional periods, teachers usually give the students a 5-minute break, and students look forward to their two recesses: one 15-minute recess after second period and one 20-minute recess after lunch.

Table 3.1 Class Schedule: Mr. Ito, Mori Fifth Graders (April 1987–March 19

Period	Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	8:40–8:50	School assembly	Teacher meeting	Teacher meeting	Teacher meeting	Teacher meeting
	8:50–8:55	a.m. meeting	a.m. meeting	a.m. meeting	a.m. meeting	a.m. meeting
1st period	8:55–9:40	Math	Japanese	Japanese	Home economics	Math
	9:40–9:45	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
2nd period	9:45–10:30	Science	Social studies	Music	Home economics	Music
	10:30–10:50	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
3rd period	10:50–11:35	Art	Physical education	Science	Physical education	Japanese
	11:35–11:40	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
4th period	11:40–12:25	Art	Math	Science	Math	Social studies

Period	Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	12:25–1:05	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
	1:05–1:25	Recess	Recess	Cleaning	Recess	Recess
	1:25–1:45	Cleaning	Cleaning	p.m. meeting	Cleaning	Cleaning
5th period	1:45–2:30	Social studies	Moral education	Go home	Japanese	Japanese
	2:30–2:40	p.m. meeting	p.m. meeting		p.m. meeting	p.m. meeting
	2:40–2:45	Break	Break		Break	Go home
6th period	2:45–3:30	Councils or free	Clubs		School time	
		Go home	Go home		Go home	

Table 3.2 Class Schedule: Mr. Seki, Umi Fifth Graders (April 1987-March 1988)

Period	Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Saturday Time
	8:10–8:30	Arrive at school	Arrive at school	Arrive at school	Arrive at school	Arrive at school	Arrive at school	8:10–8:30
	8:30–8:35	Teacher meeting	Teacher meeting	Teacher meeting	Teacher meeting	Teacher meeting	Teacher meeting	8:30–8:35
	8:35–8:45	Assembly	8:35–8:50	Whole School Exercises		Assembly	Break	8:35–8:40
	8:45–8:55	Class time	8:50–8:55	Transition to Classroom		Class Time	Japanese	8:40–9:25
1st period	8:55–9:40	Japanese	Math	Japanese	Home economics	Art	Break	9:25–9:30
	9:40–9:45	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break	Physical education	9:30–10:15
2nd period	9:45–10:30	Japanese (library)	Japanese	Music	Home economics	Art	Recess	10:15–10:30
	10:30–10:45	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Music	10:30–11:15
3rd period	10:45–11:30	Math	Science	Physical education	Science	Math	Break	11:15–11:20
	11:30–11:35	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break	Social studies	11:20–12:05
4th period	11:35–12:20	Social studies	Science	Math	Moral education	Social studies	p.m. meeting	12:05–12:10
	12:20–1:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Go home	
	1:00–1:20	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess		
5th period	1:20–2:05	Class meeting	Physical education	p.m. meeting	Math	Japanese		
	2:05–2:15	p.m. meeting	p.m. meeting	Go home	p.m. meeting	p.m. meeting		
	2:15–2:30	Cleaning	Cleaning		Cleaning	Cleaning		
	2:30–2:35	Break	Break		Break	Break		
6th period	2:35–3:20	Clubs	Councils		Free activity	Free activity		
	3:20–3:45	Go home	Go home		Go home	Go home		

At least once daily, a school cleaning time occurs during which all students clean their classrooms and other assigned areas, such as school corridors, the gymnasium, and special rooms.[5] Mori's whole school cleaning time is after lunch recess, whereas Umi's cleaning time occurs at the end of the school day. Cleaning consists of washing down blackboards, dusting and straightening shelves, shaking mats and rugs, sweeping floors, and students getting down on hands and knees with their homemade rags to mop the floors by hand. Some turn the mopping chore into relay races or other chasing, raucous games. Students clean with varying degrees of tidiness and negligence, seriousness and fun. Teachers help clean with their students to serve as role models. As one teacher explained, "You need to mix an unpleasant chore with fun to make sure they carry through with their responsibilities, so I let them be noisy and have fun while they are cleaning." In the two target classrooms, students engaged in more play than cleaning when adults were not present, whereas other classrooms seemed quite diligent with or without adults around.

A hot school lunch is served Monday through Friday after fourth period. Lunch is cooked on the premises by a kitchen crew, and everyone, including the principal, receives the same food. Teachers eat lunch in class with their students. Students rotate lunch duty in which they get the food from the kitchen, serve it to their peers, and clean up afterward. The school lunch period reveals the central features of Japanese egalitarian sentiments. The foundation of Japanese-style equal educational opportunity is that all students participate in the same subjects and activities; they receive the exact same food and materials; and students and teachers share responsibilities and experiences together.

Several noteworthy features of connectedness become evident: by cleaning the school, the students gain a sense of responsibility for and ownership of the school and everything in it; adults and students alike join in this work ethic; students gain respect for the jobs that other adult staff do for them; and students practice leadership skills, since they are responsible for organizing and helping each other in their work groups. Whether areas are truly cleaner or not, daily experience in the process is as important as the end result. Participation in the forms, being precise (*chanto, kichinto*) in their work, and interdependence with others keep the goals of self-discipline, character building, and community building ever present.

Each week, out of 32 periods of school time, 29 are required by the Ministry of Education as follows: six periods of Japanese language (one of these is calligraphy[6]), five of math, three each of social studies, science, and physical education, two each of music, art, and home economics, and one each of morals education, class meeting, and club activities. Two of the three science periods are scheduled together for laboratory time. Art and home economics are also double periods to allow for the completion of more involved projects, which these subject matters entail. Class meeting is

led by elected students, and the time is spent planning class activities, discussing class problems, resolving conflicts, and preparing for upcoming events. Club activities are enjoyable activities that students select based on their personal interests (see Section 4.8.a in Chapter 4).

The three extra periods are left to the schools discretion and are usually reserved for student council meetings (*iinkai*), free play periods, or work time to prepare for school events. All upper-grade students participate in one student council led by elected sixth graders and supervised by teachers. Most councils serve some school maintenance or student activity purpose: for example, the school beautification council ensures cleaning equipment maintenance and tends to other school appearance needs; the health council may organize a charity event or maintain health records; the sports council takes care of sports equipment, mainly keeping balls filled with air; the student assembly council organizes special whole-school events and other activities (see Section 4.8.b in Chapter 4).

Because most Umi students spend long hours after school every day studying for middle school entrance examinations, teachers expressed concern for students not getting enough time to play. Therefore, Umi reserves extra periods for free play and spends three mornings a week doing 10-minute exercises as a whole-school activity. For 10 minutes before classes begin, each grade level gathers with their own teachers in designated areas to exercise together: running laps, jumping rope, or doing dance calisthenics. Mori students have more free time at home and after school, even though their parents and teachers also complained that children do not get a chance to play outdoors often enough. Instead of free play, Mori has more school work times—for example, students and teachers clean the pool before it opens for summer instruction, and they must sweep all the gravel off the playground in preparation for their sports day. Mori

sponsors one unique event each January: a sports day when students play all sports on home-made stilts, so the school work time is spent making stilts for all students in the school. I did not observe any such times at Umi. In fact, one complaint voiced by teachers at Umi was that the students' after-school time is so programmed that they cannot use it to perfect performances. They lose the freedom to do activities that require occasional late days.

Classrooms are equipped with blackboards, bulletin boards, a television, and a desk and chair for each student. Children are usually placed in rows facing the teacher's desk in front. One salient feature of Japanese classrooms is the movable desk: students and teachers change the desk configurations to fit the various grouping patterns for different tasks throughout the day. Next to the teacher's desk, a television sits in one corner, some storage shelves are in the opposite corner, and a blackboard stretches across the front wall. On the far right corner of the blackboard, the date and student monitors for the day (*toban*) are listed. The wall that separates the classroom from the hallway is entirely display space: a bulletin board and blackboard covered with charts, schedules, monitor duties, reminders, *han* assignments, and student drawings and graffiti.

The class schedule, which corresponds to the hours required by the Ministry of Education, is posted by the teacher at the beginning of the school year and distributed to all students to affix in their backpacks (Tables 3.1 and 3.2).

In addition to the distributed class schedule (affixed to student backpacks), each room has an erasable blackboard area listing the class schedule, activities, and homework for each day. Students are responsible for updating this information as well as the date and *toban* names. The student-listed schedule is the more accurate timetable for it can

accommodate the changes necessary to fit in health exams, emergency drills, special events, organizational time, and preparations for field trips, ceremonies, and other activities.

The numerous charts reveal just a few of the multiple grouping patterns and student monitor duties used as a means for developing leadership skills in students and for delegating school and classroom management responsibilities. Besides the *toban* who rotate daily, longer-term assignments involve responsibilities performed in groups, such as student council duty, cleaning, lunch service, and *kakari* (student duties). At Umi, the *kakari* created posters, listing the members, their duties, and any requests and instructions for their fellow classmates. Duties as expressed by the students in their posters are, for example, the study group, which is responsible for distributing handouts, collecting homework, and checking to see if people brought necessary items to school; the cleaning group, which is responsible for keeping the locker area neat and tending the lost and found; and the assembly group, which is responsible for running class meetings and deciding what games to play. Without exception, each student is a member of some group and duties are performed with varying degrees of success, failure, diligence, and distraction. Group members are responsible for monitoring and helping each other and working out problems. Reflection time and regular class meetings are two specially designated processes devoted to developing the habits of mind that enable students to take on such an array of administrative and organizational leadership responsibilities.

The back wall is reserved for displaying student calligraphy, artwork, newspapers, and other student projects. Lining the lower part of the wall are student cubbyholes—one per student—just large enough to fit their backpacks and a few other items, such as recorders, other musical

instruments, and other educational materials. A tall locker filled with brooms, rags, and other cleaning paraphernalia rests in the back corner and another locker safeguards the student lunch service uniforms: white jackets and hats. The wall opposite the hallway entrance is lined with windows, sometimes opening onto a narrow balcony. The low shelves that fill the space below the windows are extra storage for materials, musical instruments, books, notebooks, and often aquariums and other live animals and plants rest on top of the shelves. Mr. Ito's class had birds and hamsters, whereas Mr. Seki's class had no animals or plants.

It is most amazing that people of all ages and from diverse areas of Japan can identify with this elaboration of physical layouts, schedules, and activities even though variations do exist. In effect, an interesting national sense of community is imparted while enabling individual connectedness along with a degree of local control. One asset of such wide-reaching commonality is *connectedness* for individuals and for the community whenever administrators, teachers, or students must change schools.

As a rule, there are no instructional aides or volunteers. The only other adults permitted in classrooms are occasional special visitors, student teachers by special arrangement, and parents on 1 or 2 specially designated parent visitation days. Homeroom teachers and their students form a closely knit group. In part out of necessity yet a nice by-product of this kind of adult/student ratio (1:30–40) is a heavy reliance on peer and self-supervision, which is usually managed quite admirably by students at all grade levels. And this ability to self-govern is systematically built into their duties, even from preschool (Boocock, 1989; Hendry, 1986; Kotloff, 1988; Lewis, 1984, 1995; Peak, 1991; Tobin, 1989; Tsuneyoshi, 2001). School practices like daily class meetings, student councils, ceremonies, *toban*, and small-group work for studies, gym, lunch, cleaning, and recess times are

part of an interconnected formal arrangement that develops students' ability to work together. Moreover, these duties remain the same from year to year so that they can improve and build on these capacities over time. Such standardization provides continuity as well as place: new students have a familiar structure that they instantaneously reenter when moving from school to school.

In Tokyo, teachers and students stay together as a class for at least 2 years (a typical pattern is first-second, third-fourth, and fifth-sixth grades).[7] One rationale for this practice is that developing the right relations takes time. One teacher summarized this nicely when she remarked, "The first year you learn how to work together as a group and understand each other, and the second year, the real learning can begin." Or as one principal stated, "The first year, you look and listen; the second year, you can act and do."

In many ways this practice reflects a fundamentally different conception of "the basics"[8] in teaching and learning in Japan than in the United States. Human relations are an essential part of the cognitive act; therefore, developing social cohesion is a priority. In the beginning of the year, teachers focus their energies on establishing the right relations with their students prior to emphasis on textbook information. The right combination of *ka-ki-ku-ke-ko* (relations, feelings, hardship, experience, and heart) establishes the all-important *kizuna*—proper trusting relations—that is prized by teachers as the basis for their ability to teach and learn together with their class. Moral education, as a subject matter, has its own textbook[9] and basically covers interpersonal relations, human values, the meaning of friendship, appreciating others' feelings, learning to work together, and exercising ethical judgments (see Appendix D). The premium placed on group membership and cohesion is best evidenced in the fact that students advance to each grade with age-level peers regardless of achievement

levels. Even though Japanese teachers are fully aware of the problems caused by disparate achievement levels within their classes, social promotion is unquestioned mainly because most teachers cannot imagine inflicting such emotional and social damage on a student. Retention and skipping grades would disrupt classroom cohesion and student community building in detrimental ways.

Knowledge transmission is just one by-product, albeit an important one, of a more comprehensive emphasis on developing *ningen* (human beings)—a major teaching goal expressed by principals, teachers, and parents. *Ningen* is a concept beyond basic skills and academics. The two *kanji* used to write *ningen* mean "amidst people." And, at the core of *ningen* is *kokoro* (physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional heart).[10]

As a result, a more holistic regard is apparent for individual students with respect to their own growth and learning and for the school as one institution of many sharing the responsibility of educating students. This "holistic frame of reference" is identified by Shimahara (1986) as one aspect of the learning environment used to motivate students. Central to this holistic view is that cognitive, social, and affective spheres are not isolated into separate categories as distinctly in Japanese thinking as in Western thought. The process of reading, computation, and studying academic subjects inextricably contains social and affective elements, and the ultimate purpose for such study is to become a *ningen*. Developing and reflecting on ones *kokoro* guides teaching-learning processes. Other researchers have documented this well-rounded focus (Azuma, 1979; Lewis, 1995; Peak, 1991; White, 1987).

The emphasis on *kokoro*, *ningen*, and human relations points to the second way the basics in elementary education are construed. Whole-person education is the ideal. Therefore, contemporary teacher roles and

knowledge must extend beyond subject matter. Student guidance, personal habits, motivation, and interpersonal relations are school and teacher responsibilities on and off campus (Inagaki & Ito, 1990; LeTendre, 2000).

Complementing the broad educational goals is a focus on processes rather than on results (Shimahara, 1986). Education is seen as a long-term process both inside and outside school,[11] as evidenced in the principals words, “The first year, you look and listen; the second year, you can act and do.” Devoting sufficient time to let the process work and to enable student discovery is essential. The absence of such practices as retention and skipping grades in Japan reflects the value placed on whole-person education and therefore on all school activities as learning activities. Moreover, instituting such practices would negate the view of education as a long-term process. Retention may interfere with a students growth. Teachers reported that some students who start out behind in earlier grades suddenly catch up with the increased challenge in higher grade levels and with the help of peers—again, relations that develop over time. Sometimes a key event like starring in the third-grade play will spark motivation and growth to turn a negligent student around.

Furthermore, no one is perfect in all the required skills to warrant skipping a grade. One teacher explained that getting a perfect score on a math test is easy compared with developing the understanding and skill to be able to teach the same content to peers. To him, true comprehension of a subject matter is not achieved unless the student can explain it to someone else. Peer teaching and learning are integral to intellectual achievement. Even though some students may be able to pass middle school-level Japanese and math tests, they may not be able to do the required handsprings, swim backstroke, play and sing melodies in F major and D minor, and carve a woodblock—all part of the fifth-sixth-grade curriculum.

And even more importantly, if they skipped a grade, they would miss playing indispensable roles in school events and ceremonies for those grade levels.

To develop a well-rounded human being, experience with and successful completion of a wealth of academic and nonacademic learning activities at each grade level are not simply essential, but academic skills cannot be fostered without such a breadth of experience. This belief is also evident in the common complaints Japanese have with their own system. From my observations, extracurricular activities, events, and ceremonies add more time and energy burdens on teachers than the subject matter teaching load. Teachers are overworked, underpaid, and subject to contradictory pressures in Japan just as elsewhere in the world, yet when pressed to offer remedies, their main complaints are too accelerated a curriculum in the academic subjects, too much material to cover in a year, and large class size. Rather than eliminate activities that Americans call “extra” curricular, the breadth of experience is assumed to be basic, and teachers offered no suggestions for eliminating any of those more energy- and time-consuming activities. The diversity of materials necessary to complete an elementary school year is impressive (see Appendix C).

3.4 Educational Materials

The overriding criterion for equity and equality of educational opportunity within schools in Japan centers on the provision of educational materials and experiences. Two notable practices, therefore, are that all students receive or must purchase the same materials and supplies and that universal participation in all activities is the norm. All students receive the same textbooks (their own copies to keep) for all subjects, including art, home economics, and music. Textbooks are colorful, attractive, accessible, and detailed. The art textbooks include engaging samples of student work that

serve as models to guide students. Music textbooks contain historical and cultural background information as well as musical scores. All textbooks have plentiful illustrations, photographs, and graphics to clearly convey content and intended learning activities. For each subject, students purchase individual notebooks for note taking, drills, and other homework.

Although uniforms are not required in public elementary schools in Tokyo, all students wear identical school hats, name badges, and standard backpacks to school.[12] These sturdy leather backpacks (often red for girls and black for boys) are expensive[13] and heavy, especially when filled with books, supplies, and pencil boxes replete not only with an incredible assortment of pens and pencils but also the students' favorite stickers and other playthings. Students also have their own music instruments (usually recorders), gym uniforms, and kits for art, home economics, and calligraphy. Each kit contains innumerable pieces. The art kit has brushes, individual tubes of acrylic paints, a watercolor paint set, cleaning rags, color-mixing dishes or a palette, and a separate tub for water. The home economics kit has sewing supplies such as thread, scissors, needles, a tape measure, a pin cushion, scraps of material, an embroidery hoop, and other necessities. For clubs, science experiments, and other activities, additional materials and supplies have to be brought from home.

Not surprisingly, every day students forget things. One of the biggest sins in elementary school is *wasuremono* (forgotten things). Mr. Seki's students had to stand as public recognition of their wayward ways, while Mr. Ito never gave such forgetfulness any special attention other than mumbling disappointment or mentioning the inconvenience and how their forgetfulness caused hardships for others. One friend disapprovingly reported that her daughter's teacher posted lists and charts recording students' forgotten things; to her dismay, her daughter was always near the

top of the chart. Given the incredible assortment of kits, materials, uniforms, and other supplies necessary to complete each day, I was impressed that many students did not forget anything.

Organization of time, responsibilities, and possessions are valued traits for school success. Developing useful habits that refine one's attention to detail along with the ability to cope with innumerable details are also a welcome carryover into homes and workplaces. Although Japanese complain about the uniformity and conformity that this standardization seems to promote, an undeniable benefit is the diversity of materials and experiences made possible by such standardization. Having common expectations and consistent requirements enables students and parents to cope with the dizzying array of activities and materials. Such complexity may even promote connectedness in encouraging parents and students to help each other. Learning through form (*katachi de hairu*) applies to the material levels as well.

In order to instill these traits, first-grade teachers spend large amounts of time in the first few months of school showing students how to pack their backpacks, organize their desks, and place materials on their desks ready for each lesson. By the time they reach sixth grade, however, not all students follow these standard ways. Less students in Mori followed the standard procedures than in Umi, but after a few days of observation, I could tell what the standard procedures were supposed to be just by the greater number of students who did manage to set their textbook on their notebook, centered on their desk, in line with the edges, and with their pencil case in line with the top of their desk. For carrying materials in the hall, the textbook was placed on top of the notebook and the pencil case on top of the textbook—all neatly aligned.

Although students are given most materials free, if they cannot afford to pay minimal fees for some supplies, they may receive assistance monies through their school. No one is denied materials or participation.

Family income data are not available through the schools. Schools are forbidden to reveal parent employment and cannot ask for parent income information. A good, indirect measure of student economic backgrounds is the number of parents applying for school aid. According to the staff at Umi and Mori, with respect to the classes I was observing, no Umi students were on such assistance and such families were rare at Umi, whereas about seven families in the Mori fifth-grade class received assistance. According to the Mori staff person, Mori's district usually has the most financial aid cases in Tokyo, and within that district, Mori tends to have the most financial aid cases of all the elementary schools. Students informally offered information regarding their parents' occupations, and more Umi students mentioned jobs such as interior designer, journalist, business owner, and doctor. Mori students reported jobs such as taxi driver, shopkeeper, factory worker, and delivery person.

What is the potential significance of ownership? While some U.S. students may have access to a comparable diversity of materials, usually those materials belong to the school and remain at school. In Japan, the textbooks and diversity of educational materials belong to each student, to be used at school and at home. Just by viewing the materials, parents may surmise student life, responsibilities, and studies. Continuity of school and home studies and practice is made possible. Rich and poor students alike are assured of having more than the basic educational materials available to them wherever they go. Since they are responsible for their own possessions, students' view of school and of their place in it may be profoundly affected. They protect the basic necessities for their studies and

their education, which in turn may powerfully influence their view of their roles in fostering their own educational growth. Again, the theme of connectedness stands out—this time in a material way but substantial in the concrete connections made possible: between parents and students, between subject matter study and home life, between studies across the grade levels, and between students and their school. Most significantly, each student's place of belonging to school and classroom life is secured, all equally deserved, equally responsible, and equally distributed in a standardized fashion.

3.5 Teacher Work Arrangements, Roles, and Responsibilities

Connectedness dominates a teacher's life in many ways: (1) connectedness to colleagues required by interdependent committees, teacher room desk assignments, and grade-level responsibilities; (2) connectedness to students through home visits, daily diaries or newslettters, reflection time, supervision during lunch, cleaning, clubs, student councils, and special events and ceremonies; (3) connectedness to parents with conferences, home visits, summer study contracts, newsletters, and daily diaries; (4) connectedness to *whole* students by seeing them in a variety of in-school and after-school activities and events; and (5) connectedness to other colleagues in varied professional development settings.

Many areas of Japanese society replicate the expectations and demands placed on students. Congruence between the adult world and student world, especially in terms of obligations, expectations, and work patterns, is invaluable to the successful daily operations of each classroom and the school as a whole. The primary sphere of influence, however, rests with the teachers and their work arrangements. Teacher work arrangements often mirror those established for students. They work together in cooperative groups, have interdependent work assignments, and have rotating duties

that all teachers must perform. Teachers participate in school management and administration the same way students participate in classroom management and administration. Many duties require minute attention to details, repetitive paperwork, tedious record keeping, and filing reports.

Like the individual classrooms, the main teachers' room is crowded and noisy because of cramped work quarters. The typical room layout consists of the principal's and vice principal's desks at one end of the room facing the teachers' desks clustered in grade-level groupings in the center of the room. And like the classroom teachers' desks, the administrators' desks are backed by a large blackboard that lists the monthly calendar of meetings, events, and student activities on the left side and the date, teacher monitors (*toban*), and daily staff meeting agenda on the right side. Other areas are reserved for copying and materials preparation and for tea and coffee preparation.

Teachers' main work desks are in the teachers' room, and their classroom desks are used just for teaching and student work primarily during classroom time. Two reasons are organizational: the single working room for all teachers signals the cohesive work group akin to family that they supposedly constitute, and their interdependent, cooperative work groups necessitate ongoing communication facilitated by the open area, which allows for constant contact, interaction, and negotiations. A third reason is cultural: even if teachers prefer the privacy of their own classrooms, strong collegial pressures obligate them to join the collective work environment.

The fourth and final reason reflects the strong classroom identification of teachers and students together as the primary working unit. Everything left in the classroom is subject to students' scrutiny; anyone and anything brought into their realm also becomes a part of the group, subject to their examination. Students are careful not to disturb anything, but nothing

escapes their inspection and gossip. Thus, any private or valuable work or possessions are best left in the teachers' room.

Because schools run Monday through Saturday and fewer vacation days spot the calendar, Japanese teachers work many more days than their American counterparts. Moreover, they work many more than the 240 scheduled school days. Teachers report to school at least half of their 50 to 60 school vacation days, and some teachers schedule activities with students outside school. Various meetings, administrative tasks, and curriculum planning must be done during the 2-week breaks over New Year's time and between school years. As noted earlier, half of the 6-week summer break consists of swimming instruction. Since teaching is considered a full-time occupation, teacher salaries reflect a 12-month pay period, and teachers are forbidden to do any other paid work, even on their own time.

The number of workdays is extraordinary. In addition, many often get to work early (7 to 7:30 a.m.) and stay late (5 to 6:00 p.m.) to prepare for the next day, consult with each other, and tend to other administrative tasks.[14] I have to admit that after 2 weeks of going to school Monday through Saturday with only Sunday to recover, I was completely exhausted—and I was only observing classes, not teaching them and not serving on any of the numerous work committees.

Every day begins with a staff meeting led by the teacher *toban*. This meeting is the primary means to organize many whole-school events and to communicate various needs, plans, problems, staff development opportunities, teacher sporting events,[15] congratulations, and thanks. At the same time, students in their classrooms are responsible for self-study (quizzes, drills, homework) and other monitor duties, such as taking attendance, collecting homework, planning activities, and preparing

materials. After the teacher arrives in class, students have their daily morning meeting led by the student *toban. Toban* duties rotate daily, and eventually everyone must be a *toban*.

Besides a rigorous daily teaching load, teachers in Japan have additional administrative and extracurricular duties. Just as students are divided into cooperative work groups called *han*, teachers are divided into grade-level and mixed grade-level *han* for school administration purposes, such as finance, health and nutrition, student life guidance and activities, textbook selection, and school-wide curriculum development and planning with representatives from each grade level. In addition to teaching their homeroom class, teachers share responsibilities for running student councils, club activities, and whole-school activities, events, and ceremonies.

These work groups, extracurricular activities and events, and frequent whole-grade and whole-school activities cultivate interaction between teachers, both within and between grade levels. Another structural feature of Japanese schools that demands continuous communication is the required rotation of administrators and teachers. Districts throughout Japan differ, but administrators in Tokyo change schools every 3 or 4 years, and teachers change every 6 or 7 years. Organizationally, it means that each year several veteran staff leave and new members arrive. The new members include a range of veteran teachers (those who have taught for many years) and novice teachers. Incoming veteran and novice teachers are equally unfamiliar with the school’s climate, relations, activities, and modes of operation. Thus, regardless of years of teaching experience, teachers become dependent on one another based on their familiarity with the school; cooperative teaching and learning is a process among teachers, too.

On the positive side, this rotation of teachers ensures a constant invigoration of new ideas and fresh energy; however, loss of an inspirational teacher or principal may disrupt a cohesive work group and may dampen or even terminate exciting reforms and new curricular ideas. A commendable offshoot of this required rotation is that teachers develop friendships and professional contacts that span across schools and districts, forming an ever-widening network, a built-in support group, and a compelling professional development mechanism. On the other hand, a potential loss might be the educational benefits that could accrue from long-term parent and community relations with the same teachers.

Whatever the effect, lively camaraderie and constant communication characterize student and teacher lives in Japan. Along with the assets gained in mutual support and an increased sense of community come unavoidable conflicts, forced compromise, and extra time and energy demands.

The main difference between the school climates and organization at Umi and Mori is the degree of formality. Umi is a more formally operated school, careful to maintain its image in the community and conscientiously responsive to the demands of a student and parent population with high expectations for achievement. Umi's reputation, as reported by professors, parents, and teachers, is the dedication of the teaching staff who work relatively long hours and the students who study long hours, attend academic *juku*, and follow more polite, standard forms of decorum and speech. Teacher meetings and communication patterns follow established procedures and rules. *Keigo* [16] is used in meetings and at other appropriate times, whereas informal or neutral speech is used at Mori. Formal procedures are not precisely followed, so Mori's meetings and mode of operation feel more informal.

For example, at Umi the daily morning meeting begins when a bell rings, and all teachers stand and bow to greet the principal and vice principal with a hearty “good morning,” to which they bow and reply. Prior to the meeting, teachers with announcements write their names and topics on the blackboard in front. The *toban* conducts the meeting with a degree of formality and punctiliousness. Across the city at Mori, no such bell rings, the *toban* mentions it is time to begin the meeting, and everyone who is not otherwise distracted mumbles a “good morning.” The *toban* asks if anyone has any business, teachers make announcements at random, and the meeting proceeds in an informal manner. In all schools I observed, the last item is reserved for comments from the principal and vice principal. The same tasks are accomplished, but the style and manner differ.

Umi’s school brochure also reflects the degree of formality and attention to educational standards: its 61 pages document educational goals, policies, and plans for each area of student life, not only each subject matter but also health, nutrition, safety, student activities, life guidance, cleaning, and special events. Teacher responsibilities for each of these areas, total number of hours spent in these activities, rules, and criteria for assigning students to classroom groupings are also spelled out in detail.

Mori has many of the same goals, policies, and plans worked out on an informal basis, but they are not published in a school document for public dissemination. Mori’s document (also entitled *Gakko Kyoiku Yoran*, or *School Educational Outline*) is a one-page (10 by 20 inches) folded handout printed on both sides.[17] The opening flap displays a woodblock print of the school carved by a student or a photograph of some student activity. As expressed in interviews with the principal, teachers, and parents, Mori prides itself on the child-centered nature of its school operations and teaching philosophy. The principal stated that despite extra work, teachers

at this school put in more time if they believe the extra activity benefits students. Mori is also attuned to its image in the community and responsive to its student and parent population, but the community seems to entrust more to the school to do its job in raising children's achievement levels.

As already noted, teachers' roles and responsibilities in Japan encompass a broad range of administrative, teaching, parental, and counseling duties involving attention to the entire cognitive, social, psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of their students, on and off campus. In turn, students are accountable to their teachers for a wide range of personal and academic habits beyond school walls. For example, prior to each vacation period, students must submit their daily schedules (hour by hour) listing what they will do (watch TV, read, wake-up times, bedtimes, study times, playtimes). Teachers read each schedule and comment or revise it, and the parents, students, and teachers sign the document as a mutual pact. If any misbehavior outside school happens, witnesses often report the behavior to the school. Teachers and principals are responsible for contacting parents and together handling the affair with students. In cases of stealing, teachers, principals, and parents must apologize in person to the store owners. School rules regulate much of students' personal lives: their appearance, their study and personal habits, and their behaviors. This reveals the importance of school as the primary organization with which students identify. Broad responsibilities necessitate and ensure a more holistic view of students and their education, in turn promoting varied experiences and means for securing such a holistic view.

Teacher-parent ties are established or renewed at the beginning of each year through home visits. Over a 2-week period, school dismisses students early each day so that teachers can visit the homes of each student in the afternoon. Teachers visit five or six families each day for about 10 to 15

minutes per visit so that they can gain a sense of community influences, the home environment, and parental concerns. Some teachers look at the study space set aside for the student, whereas others just talk to the parents. Individual face-to-face contact seems to be the most important connection to establish.

Daily contact is maintained through various means. Earlier grade levels have *renrakucho* (parent-teacher contact notebooks). First-grade *renrakucho* are most elaborate, listing educational goals for each trimester and for each month's activities, along with a calendar of all school events and meetings, individual class schedules, and lists of class meetings, activities, clubs, council meetings, and school rules. Other pages contain address and phone information about the student, siblings, close friends in school, and walk-to-school groups. Still other pages are for record keeping. If properly maintained, students can trace the yearly development of their jump-rope skills, swimming accomplishments, lap running, and health exams. Most of the pages are reserved for ongoing communication with parents. Whenever parents have concerns, they write them in the book, teachers respond, and vice versa. For first graders, teachers may use these daily, but by the sixth grade, a plain notebook serves as the parent communication link only when necessary.

Many teachers spend extra hours composing detailed, creative, and informative newsletters to send to parents, as many as three times per week. These newsletters communicate the teachers goals and personality, applaud student accomplishments, set expectations for parent involvement, and inform parents of current studies and impending events. Mr. Ito distributed a newsletter about every other day, and twice a year parents who had saved the newsletters could turn them in to be bound as a keepsake of their child's elementary school year. Mr. Seki did not distribute a newsletter; instead,

students turned in diary entries every other day as a way of maintaining individual channels of communication. He read each one, wrote comments, and returned them daily. Diaries seem to be a common method for getting to know students better as individuals.[18] At the end of each year, Mr. Seki compiled a booklet of student drawings and writings as a keepsake, with each student composing his or her own page.

Throughout the year, various ceremonies, parent events (such as parent-student soccer games or performances), parent classroom visitation days, PTA meetings, and other school-wide events provide additional means for teachers to interact with parents, building social ties and allowing time to express concerns about the curriculum and student progress. Because most working parents in Japan work on Saturday, one Sunday per year is scheduled as a parent visitation day so that all parents may attend their children's classes at least once during the year.

Teachers in Japan systematically engage in self-study and/or research groups. The journal publications of educational research conducted by teachers and for teachers outnumber those of university educational researchers in Japan: of the total publications, two-thirds were written by teachers and one-third were written by educational researchers (M. Sato, 1992). Others form voluntary study groups in which members review and critically evaluate each other's curriculum activities and ideas. These groups meet outside school time and are impressive. I regularly attended one group (led by Mr. Ito), and the level of discourse regarding painting techniques, choir conducting, poetry, voice projection, teaching handsprings, and social studies concepts was outstanding. Even more intriguing was the array of student drawings, cassette tapes of singing, and videotapes of classroom teaching or physical education that formed the basis for soliciting advice and suggestions and for stimulating discussions

on a range of educational issues. The observed participants are quite dedicated, thoughtful practitioners. The quality of student work is enviable as is the teachers' reflective discourse and feedback, though they always find room for constructive criticism, challenging ideas, and improvement. Although these study groups are not commonplace, they are not unusual. In his 1981 survey of 3,987 teachers, M. Sato found that 53% of the teachers had been active in such voluntary study groups (Sato et al., 1990, p. 2). Unfortunately, given increased exam pressures that narrow the range of what must be taught, teacher participation in such groups may be dwindling.

Another useful vehicle for feedback and for additional perspectives on elementary school life was a joint university researcher-school practitioner research seminar. Professor Inagaki sponsored one such seminar at the University of Tokyo. Once again, these seminars were teacher centered and teacher presentations were always student centered, largely focused on student work, engendering questions and analysis from actual examples of videotapes, student products, or cassette tapes of singing. Mr. Ito and several of his colleagues participated in this group. Mr. Seki participated in more formal professional development workshops led by district or regional offices.

Many teachers who do not join professional organizations or teacher study groups cultivate other talents and skills that indirectly enhance their professional development. For example, Mrs. Fujita studies calligraphy and oil painting and exhibits her work. Others join choral groups, study piano, or form parent-teacher reading clubs. Adults and students in Japan have many hobbies and educational pursuits apart from their usual employment or studies. These formal and informal ways to enhance lifelong learning

comprise a contagious cultural milieu in support of school learning (see Section 6.5.a in Chapter 6).

One standard form of in-service training consists of teachers observing another teacher's classroom instruction for one period during the school day. After school, teachers meet and the observed teacher distributes the lesson plan and reflects upon the lesson, including self-evaluation. Following the reflective activity, others contribute comments and questions as a springboard for discussing the curriculum in general. Videotapes maybe used to review certain sections in depth or for other instructional research purposes. Sharing of ideas and activities occurs on a regular basis. Other researchers have documented these teacher in-service mechanisms (Inagaki & Ito, 1990, 1991; Lewis & Tsuchida, 1997, 1998; Sato & McLaughlin, 1992; Shimahara, 1998a; Shimahara & Sakai, 1995; Yang, 1994).

The fact that Japanese teachers work in multiple learning communities may be quite significant for maintaining a more uniformly high-quality teaching force and for maintaining teacher morale and enthusiasm. These stimulating and innumerable spheres for additional adult learning, both personal and professional, along with required rotation between schools, ensure continual professional development and serve as a strong mechanism for new teacher induction in Japanese schools. In fact, U.S. researchers advocate nurturing strong teacher learning communities to effectively improve educational practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999; Lieberman, 1990; Little, 1982; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001).

In summary, an elementary teachers job is one of the busiest, energy-draining, and time-consuming jobs I can imagine. In order to provide students with a wide array of educational experiences, the teacher must

plan, participate in, reflect upon, and evaluate these activities. Standardization of many practices helps to offer this diversity. But sharing the burdens and joys of their work also seems to help teachers keep up with demands. While the collegial support may engender enthusiasm and infuse energy, the same closeness incurs obligations and inevitable sacrifices. Time, effort, energy, tolerance, patience, perseverance, flexibility, and, above all, a sense of humor are necessary ingredients to maximize participation, incorporate everyone's feelings and opinions, and make progress as a group. After all, if one wants to be heard, one must be willing to listen. If one receives help to complete a task on time, one must give help to others in turn.

Shorter-term individual sacrifices are viewed as inescapable to reap longer-term benefits from group cohesion and camaraderie and to experience the incomparable joy of success wrought by togetherness. But individual wants, needs, and opinions are not entirely sacrificed; they are merely relegated to other times and means of expression. Avoidance of direct conflict and an accommodating appearance are crucial to maintain harmony on the surface; meanwhile, the underlying frustration and conflicts are worked out among friends, using private channels, and behind closed doors.

Thus, although connectedness can energize and improve effectiveness, much sacrifice, time, and frustration inescapably accompany such interdependence. The ways that these structures and patterns are transferred into daily and weekly teaching and learning processes over the course of a year reveal nested levels of community—important places of belonging for students and teachers, regardless of the time and frustration costs. The intriguing aspect is how it all connects in the end to create community as a process over time rather than getting lost in the mistakes and imperfect

completion of discrete duties at each moment in time. To gain a sense of the imperfections, commotion, and nested levels of participation from a student point of view, Chapter 4 takes us into the students' lives, beginning with patterns established in the school week and across the year. In some ways, the numerous differences are a refreshing detour from an overall sameness, yet the sameness is a welcome security for making sense of it all.

Notes

1. *Pachinko* is a favorite pastime and form of gambling for some Japanese. The game is somewhat akin to pinball, with the goal of getting the metal balls into the right slots to win more balls. These balls may be replayed, or if enough are amassed, they may be taken to a counting area where umbrellas, cigarettes, clocks, chocolate, food, and other convenience store-type items can be won, depending on the number of balls. Although it is not strictly associated with lower classes or poorer neighborhoods, *pachinko* parlors would never be found in the wealthiest or status-conscious areas of Tokyo.
2. *Katakana* is the syllabary used to incorporate foreign words into Japanese written language. All foreign words, of any language, are broken down into their closest Japanese-sounding equivalent.
3. In line with the Japanese custom of taking street shoes off when entering the house, Japanese schools have shoe lockers for street shoes, and students and teachers bring their own "inside school" shoes. Lockers are assigned by grade level, with separate sections for teachers, parents, and visitors. Visitors are provided with open-heeled, slip-on slippers or they may bring their own "inside" shoes or slippers.
4. Beginning in 1998, schools were open only two Saturdays per month and in 2003, Saturday school days were eliminated which generated

mixed reviews among the Japanese.

5. In Nagano, students cleaned areas before school began each day in addition to their whole-school cleaning time during the middle of the day.
6. Calligraphy is the art of writing Japanese characters with a brush and black ink. Students practice calligraphy by painting individual characters over and over on pages of white rice paper. Attention to the aesthetics of balance, proportion, and line are important to craft the perfect character on paper. Stroke order, direction, length, and shape must be just right on the first try because one is not allowed to erase or touch up imperfect areas. Proper posture, brush technique, and equipment are also important in the art of calligraphy. Each student has his or her own kit complete with ink stone, ink stick (or bottle of ink), brushes, clean-up rags and newsprint, felt pad, and paperweight.
7. Americans call this “looping.” In Nagano, classes remain together with their teachers for 3 years (first-third and fourth-sixth). The only exception to the rules would be rare cases when grade-level teacher groups cannot manage to get along with one another or more common cases when teachers must leave a school for their next rotation. As mentioned earlier, teachers are required to change schools every 3 to 7 years. One minority school in Osaka was an exception because of the difficulty in finding teachers dedicated enough to work the long hours with the kind of commitment necessary to foster their students’ education. Teachers in that school can stay beyond the standard term of tenure. This Osaka school also had instructional aides for students behind grade level in their work.
8. “The basics” is enclosed in quotation marks to distinguish its meaning from that used in Japan. When used within quotes, “the basics” refers

to its restricted definition, as in the United States, referring to the three *Rs* or academics. Without quotes, the basics refers to its meaning in the Japanese context, referring to a broader range of academic and nonacademic content, knowledge, and skill areas, as derived from my study and described in this book.

9. Although the teachers never used the textbook in class while I observed, they covered similar material in other ways throughout the days. Mr. Ito held spontaneous discussions as problems developed among his students. Mr. Seki utilized special segments broadcast on NHK, the Japanese educational television network. Students may have been instructed to read them, but coverage of the textbook was not systematic. Thus, moral education as presribed by the Ministry of Education is a relatively minor subject, but the intent is well covered in other ways.
10. See discussion of this concept in Chapter 2.
11. Policy implementation reflects this long-term view. Usually the Ministry of Education announces major policy and curriculum changes many years in advance. Implementing desired changes can be a 5- to 10-year process: identifying model schools and programs, having a small number of schools devise workable plans, then conducting staff training seminars led by practitioners involved in the reforms. Meanwhile, input from all levels through the established channels is sought.
12. Uniforms are required in private schools and in public middle and senior high schools. A common rationale given for uniforms and other regulations regarding appearance is equity: wealth cannot be discerned by outward appearance. Hairstyles and dress are highly regulated in schools; for example, middle school girls with naturally curly hair

must bring notes from doctors testifying that they do not have perms. The middle school that most Mori students attend is one of the few schools left in Tokyo that requires crew cuts for boys—hair can be no longer than the width of a finger. One high school teacher explained that teachers are not allowed to wear earrings in order to set an example for the students. Jewelry, make-up, and other ornamentation are forbidden in elementary schools. I have heard many complaints from Japanese about the detailed and seemingly excessive regulation in schools, but such regulation also extends into many workplaces. Some Japanese bemoan the conformity and uniformity that such detailed rules engender; however, others feel relieved from having to worry about appearance. Sixth-grade students facing the constrictions of such regulations do not like them.

13. Backpacks I saw on sale in department stores cost 22,000 to 30,000 yen, or $176 to $240 based on the 125 yen/$l exchange rate when I was conducting my research.
14. The teachers in one Osaka minority school worked regularly until 10 or 11 p.m., eating dinner over meetings and conducting many home visits in order to instill better study habits or to improve motivation of students left without adult supervision at home. One Nagano classroom grew rice as a class project, so the teacher worked with students in the fields at 5 a.m. every day during winter vacation.
15. To promote team spirit, physical health, and a diversion to their regular work schedules, each school fields a team of staff and teachers to play other elementary schools in the district. A different sport is played each trimester. For example, during my observation time, softball was played in the spring, badminton in the fall, and volleyball in the winter.

Umi teachers practiced often after school, while Mori teachers and staff just practiced a few times before a game.

16. *Keigo* is the formal, polite level of Japanese speech. Japanese speech contains many different levels and types of language, and its usage is differentiated by public/private dimensions, formal/informal occasions, superior/inferior dimensions, and insider/outsider distinctions, among others. In general, informal language is reserved for the familiar, private, inferior, insider, and informal occasions. Superior/inferior dimensions are determined by role relations and age; thus, children are usually addressed in informal language. Teachers within a school use informal language with each other, but in a meeting format they may switch to neutral, polite language and may address the principal in polite language. In more formal occasions the polite *keigo* language is used.

    Lessons on the different types of language use are part of the Japanese language curriculum, and *keigo* is formally introduced in upper elementary grades. Without proper knowledge of language use, one can easily offend someone by using an inappropriate language level. This is also a built-in mechanism revealing the centrality of knowing one's relationship to others as part of defining oneself.
17. Mori is the only school I visited with the one-page brochure system. The rest have longer manuals similar to Umi. All contain the same basic information. Umi's contains more detail, as noted.
18. When I presented my research at a Japanese women's college, I was expressing my awe at the use of these diaries sometimes on a daily basis. Thinking they may have been unique to one school, I asked the college students if they had heard of this practice. Many looked at each other and seemed hesitant to respond. The professor changed the

4

A School Week and a Year in the Students' Lives

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4.1 Beginning the School Week: Whole-School Ceremony

A bell rings. Students scurry to line up in preparation for the whole school assembly.[1] Teachers leave their desks, put on their playground shoes, and go outside to join their students. Each week, the school week in Japan begins and ends with a whole-school assembly. It lasts just about 10 minutes and seems to be taken for granted, yet it is important for cultivating identity as a whole-school group, for reinforcing the value of ceremonies and rituals, and for training proper, public forms of behavior.

Students form single-file lines by height and by classroom group. First and second graders line up in the center flanked by third and fourth graders on either side, and fifth- and sixth-grade lines comprise the far left and right sides, respectively. On a more formal occasion, teachers stand in a row in front, facing their classroom group. Usually, however, teachers stand along the front or on the periphery, and those concerned with proper decorum of their students walk up and down their line correcting student postures and standing near the irrepressible chatterbox or the student in perpetual motion.

"*Ki o tsuke*! (Attention!)," the emcee briskly shouts to call the assembly to order and to elicit the proper standing posture: straight legs, feet together,

hands and arms to the sides, chin up, and looking forward. On the whole, children's backs straighten, feet come together, and straightened arms reach forward to measure the appropriate distance (arm's length) to the person in front of them. Then the arms drop straight to their sides. "*Yasume* (at ease)," the emcee continues when satisfied with the initial response. If not satisfied, he or she will make a comment about some students not being ready and start again with "*Ki o tsuke*!" When the emcee says, "*Yasume*,"students may spread their feet shoulder width apart and clasp their hands behind their backs. But many just relax their body posture. And the listening begins.

The emcee is usually a teacher or the vice principal; the duty rotates among the teachers. Besides calling the assembly to order, the emcee runs the meeting: first conducting reciprocal morning greetings, then explaining the goal for the week and making announcements, reserving the last slot for the administrator's speech. The reciprocal morning greetings consist of the emcee bowing and saying, "*Ohayoo gozaimasu* (good morning)."[2] In response, all students, teachers, and staff bow together and say, "*Ohayoo gozaimasu* (good morning)." Inevitably, the older elementary students mumble their greeting rapidly with a bob of their heads, while the diligent first graders and younger students bow deeply and say each syllable with pride. This quickly became one of my favorite parts of the school week because everyone else is standing, waiting several seconds for the first graders to finish. A hearty greeting, especially the first of the day, is highly valued in Japan for the emotional connectedness it promotes and the physical well-being it represents. Teachers praise students for noteworthy effort in their greetings; goals of the week include those regarding proper greetings—for example, "Do your morning greetings with care and effort." The greeting acknowledges an established relationship and signals cordial

respect. The more heartfelt and hearty the greeting, the better the feelings that are communicated and the harmony that is created.[3]

The whole-school assembly is the only regular point of contact students have with the principal and vice principal each week. The two building administrators take turns conveying the main message of the week to students. Their speech is the core element of the assembly as it is in many ceremonies. It may be congratulatory (praising student behavior or achievements), amusing (a story usually with a moral ending), or instructional (inculcating cultural values or virtues). For example, after one field trip, the principal remarked how proud he was because a worker had complimented the students' well-mannered behavior. Another time he lauded the merits of art and perseverance while showing paintings of three students who had won awards at the district art show. As an outsider, I was intrigued by one vice principal's speech about the virtues of handkerchiefs. He explained that he carried two handkerchiefs: one to wipe the sweat off his brow or to clean up messes, and the other he kept clean, using it only after washing his hands.[4]

The overall aura was one of straight single-file lines, attentive silence, and acceptable posturing. However, upon closer inspection I noticed that the lines were never quite straight, and students stood in differing degrees of correct posturing, with some students (especially the jaded fifth and sixth graders) never standing straight. I could see an arm resting on a hip, a knee bent, a head cocked to the side. Or among the uncontrollably wiggly first and second graders, arms were swinging, feet were tapping, and faces were turned in every direction.

Communication in many subtle forms continued even while the principal spoke: glances to a friend, a nod, a slap on a neighboring head or shoulder, cross-line whispers and smiles. Younger students giggled, talked, to

themselves and to each other, and a momentary scuffle could erupt, especially if someone got kicked from behind. Teachers, too, did not need words to convey warnings or disapproval: a cock of the head, a raised chin, a piercing look, a hand gently but firmly placed on a shoulder, or simply a deliberate stance in a carefully selected place. If teachers really expected complete conformity, they could spend a much longer time yelling and trying to secure each student's attention and proper conduct. They could be strict and authoritarian, but most choose to ignore the imperfections in favor of staying on schedule and preventing such gatherings from becoming too tedious. Older students tolerate the assembly but do not particularly like it.

Umi's whole-school assemblies were more formal, and more students followed the procedures for straightening their lines and postures. Similarly, teachers repeated, "*Ki o tsuke*!" more often to secure the proper lineup. On the other hand, Mori teachers rarely repeated the lining-up process. They only said, "*Ki o tsuke*!" to signal the beginning of the assembly without the follow-up, "*Yasume*," since students were mostly at ease anyway. And except for the first graders who had just learned the appropriate procedures for lining up, students generally did not outstretch their arms to space themselves before coming to attention. Both schools enjoyed about the same degree of attentive assembly behavior. Umi reserved time to listen to the national anthem and to watch the flag raising, whereas no such time ever occurred at Mori.[5]

Leaving the playground was dramatically different at each school. At Umi, marching music played over the loudspeaker, students began marching in place with knees high, then followed a preset route with their teachers leading them to the doors. The fifth and sixth graders had to maintain alignment in rows of four and march around the playground two times before entering school. Each teacher stood at a corner to mark the

turning points and to admonish students who were not in line or not marching carefully. Admittedly, the admonishments were made with a smile, a tease, and a chuckle more than with stern gravity, and older students walked more than marched.[6] At Mori, music played and some students marched off (especially the first graders), but generally students exited in whatever fashion they chose.

Once inside the hallways, teachers returned to the teachers' room to finish last-minute tasks and students headed toward their classrooms with 10 minutes to prepare for the teacher's arrival. At this point, the school differences vanished, and students resumed their similar noisy, rowdy behaviors at both schools. Although running in the hallway is against school rules, I observed such running on a daily basis. Students scream, yell, laugh, kick, wrestle, play tag, and roughhouse every break period, and adults rarely interfere.

4.2 Understanding "Supervision" as Interpersonal Relations: The Heart of Teaching and Learning Processes

The most striking feature of Japanese elementary schools is the loud noise level. The second is that teachers do not seem to monitor it. At first, I was perplexed but fascinated by the lack of adult supervision and the range of tolerated behaviors and boisterous noise levels, especially because the uncontrolled noise and behaviors were obviously not a sign of lack of control. During the morning teachers' meeting, students exercise, play, or study on their own, and sometimes they stay after school unsupervised. No adults monitor the playground during recesses before or after school. Fifth and sixth graders go to classrooms in different parts of the building and perform many duties and studies without adult supervision. Of course, teachers are on the premises and are responsible for their students, but they do not worry about directly supervising their students at all times.

No substitutes were called in when teachers were absent for professional development seminars or other district work. Students were given work, told what to do, and left on their own. Occasionally, the vice principal or neighboring teacher might drop in, but during my entire observation period students managed themselves and completed tasks with or without teachers present. Off-task behavior sometimes increased, but work was completed and no incidents occurred. One time I observed a first-grade teacher at Mr. Ito's school leave her first graders to finish lunch, prepare to go home, and dismiss themselves. The neighboring teacher popped his head in two times to see if everything was running smoothly. Students finished their day and went home just as the teacher had instructed. Two questions arise: Why are Japanese students left unsupervised so often? Or, why do American students require so much supervision?

In time I realized the significance of these "unsupervised" times at each school. The above superficial, first-level interpretations evolved into secondary and tertiary levels of understanding as interconnected layers were revealed. For example, what I first interpreted as unsupervised behavior revealed an American bias that students need constant adult supervision. After further observation, I realized that students are always "supervised" whether or not adults are around because peer and self-supervision form an integral part of authority and control mechanisms at work in Japanese schools. The third level of understanding evolved as I untangled specifics regarding these mechanisms; tasks are accomplished with a mixture of adult, peer, and self-supervision carefully orchestrated in subtle, multiplicitous, and sensitive ways. For example, adults do monitor the noise and behavior; they just do it in quiet ways and avoid verbal battles.

In other words, with greater delegation of authority to students and with assignment of duties in groups, peer and self-supervision are just as

important for control as adult supervision. Having established the proper, caring relations between themselves and their students, teachers enjoy invisible authority, the most effective kind. Once they have prepared students and set expectations in a thorough and thoughtful manner, direct adult supervision is unnecessary as peer and self-supervision take control. Problems and issues arise daily; dealing with them depends on the situation, including sometimes ignoring misbehavior. Teachers seemed to secure more control during class and other crucial times by not exerting control at other times and relinquishing control at still other times. They sought a delicate balance between the noise of engagement and enjoyment and the noise of disruption and dismay.

Issues of authority and control are set within a complex network of cultural values, norms, rituals, and interpersonal relations. The "standardized" group work patterns and other rituals comprise critical *forms* of learning. Entering through form (*katachi de haeru*) and remembering through continuity over time, peer tutoring and mutual assistance become automatic forms of interaction. They are also painstakingly and sensitively nurtured on a daily basis: repeated practice in physical and mental forms such as goal setting, reflection, and self-evaluation. While more democratic and educative in some ways, opportunities for abuse of these powers exist, thus requiring sensitive monitoring—dancing the fine lines between delegated student leadership and adult intervention. Mindful caring and empathy must be developed in tandem with responsibility and authority. Chapters 5 and 6 explore how these different cultural notions and classroom management patterns influence teaching-learning processes.

Below the surface appearance, I discovered interlocking pieces of the puzzle, and I began distinguishing substantial threads of the educational tapestry.

4.3 Threads of Significance

Represented in the 10-minute ceremony and the hallway retreat to the classroom are many key elements of the elementary school experience for Japanese students. Three threads stand out to help make sense of the observed teaching-learning processes. One thread is the simultaneous attention to exterior, surface appearances or areas made explicit and the corresponding interior, underlying reality or aspects that remain implicit. Comprehending one without the other is insufficient for knowing how to proceed; discerning the interplay between the two is telling. As one example, my eventual understanding of the "unsupervised" behavior as a mix of explicit bonds and implicit obligations helped to unravel some of the secrets to authority and control issues in elementary classrooms. Another example is the ongoing distinction between formal, public behavior and the accompanying kinds of verbal and nonverbal expressions and more informal, private behaviors and expression of opinions.

An interesting balance between elaborate rituals and codes of conduct and their lenient enforcement or flexibility of application in practice is imperative. Naturally, some codes must be strictly honored (in order to "enter through form"), while many experience varying degrees of alterations (after all, no one is perfect, and not all will enter at once!). A related interaction is that between the standardized structure, protocol, and expectations explicitly delineated in the abstract and the unpredictable forces of reality in practice. This interaction occurs daily in classrooms, and it also brings to light cascading layers of generalizations that break down into diversity at successively local, more specific levels of analysis. For example, standardization set at the national level tumbles into province-level diversity, while province-level standardized practices succumb to further diversity at the district level, and so on until it trickles into each

individual classroom. What is homogeneous at one level using one set of criteria becomes heterogeneous at another level of classification, or what is generalizable to a group at one level breaks down into finely tuned differences when individual cases are investigated. Part of the reason is human nature, but another is an all-important range of freedom at the local level within the established overall structure.

The second thread is this umbrella of standardization, structure, and form overlaying actual diversity. The tension between standardization conceived in general and the particular, peculiar circumstances surrounding its implementation must be resolved at each local site. Translation into practice resides with individual practitioners who have a multitude of personalities, preferences, and philosophies. Importantly, as professionals, they safeguard the wisdom of practice. The ways that ideas on paper are converted into reality depend on their eloquence, their vitality, their passion, and their compassion. How teachers make the best use of individual and group dynamics, how they weave between different levels of uniformity and diversity, and how they make room for freedom within structure form central elements to the art and craft of teaching[7] in the observed classrooms.

All the teachers I observed in Japan fit this depiction of professionals with considerable wisdom of practice. Individually, their strengths and weaknesses vary, but all share a vitality in their teaching and learning, a passion for their profession, and a compassion for their students and work. One ongoing tension within Japanese educational circles is the extent to which the Ministry of Education regards teachers as civil servants bound to follow scripted guides and mandated policy and the extent to which teachers as professionals are allowed freedom to exercise judgment in sculpting educational programs, in effect to employ their wisdom of practice.[8]

The third thread is a cultural one, the five *Ks* thread.[9] Within the opening ceremony are several cultural elements and rituals reflective of values and processes in other institutions in Japan. Several cultural values naturally support school practices that contribute to smooth, efficient classroom operations and teaching-learning processes. A few examples are an aesthetic of symmetry, attention to form, order, cleanliness, and neatness, endurance of inconvenience, and the value of repetition for learning and for cultivating self-discipline (*kuroo*). These values contribute to *ii kimochi* (good feelings) and facilitate *kankei* (relations) through *keiken* (experiences) that develop *kokoro*. As such the educational process receives constant attention along with the final product or performance.

The ceremony itself is culturally significant. Ceremonies signify beginnings and endings—a way to celebrate meaningful junctures and spotlight important life cycle events that recognize individual growth and the vital role others play in supporting one's progress. The requisite awareness of one's relations to others and of the kinds of feelings transmitted in innumerable ways constitutes the most basic skill in Japanese schools and society.

Ceremonies underscore the centrality of relations between people. The institutional hierarchy may be discerned in the formal proceedings, and speeches transmit the core message. Some ceremonies and parties officially mark the starting or ending of each set of relations. When new students and teachers arrive or old friends must leave, an introduction ceremony or a send-off party marks the event. The send-off party or ceremony does not put closure into a relationship; it merely adds closure to a certain period of the involved persons' lives, and in fact the party or ceremony may solidify ongoing relations, perhaps to be renewed at a later time, or more importantly, to endure in spirit. The party also helps to ease the pain of

separation. My arrival and departure met with a formal introduction and ended with a party climaxed by receiving a gift, usually of letters and drawings from each student assembled into a little booklet to express their parting sentiments.

These formal ways to channel relationship building and expression of feelings can be quite touching. They somehow serve to cement the connections of the moment into bonds of a lifetime: an acknowledgment that our lives have been permanently influenced by the time spent together. Major ceremonies, such as the entrance and graduation ceremonies, are particularly poignant emotional centerpieces. Gift giving within these ceremonies and at other obligatory times of the year are symbolic forms of acknowledging gratitude, relations, and obligations.[10] As inclusive community events, the standardization of their occurrence relieves the burden of deciding who will be recognized and of making the recognition equitable: equity in equality, communal feelings taking precedence over recognition of individual contributions and their relative merits.

Other ceremonies foster group identity and maintain ongoing relations deliberately on several levels: work group units, classroom, grade-level or crossgrade identity, extending self to group obligations. The weekly opening and closing assemblies exemplify whole-school community building. Some closing assemblies are run by the student assembly council and end the week on a pleasurable note—for example, a skit, an illustrated story reading, or games the entire student body can play together. There are also ceremonies and parties that celebrate the beginning and ending of each year or of major projects between fellow workers and friends. These parties explicitly recognize mutual gratitude and hard work and implicitly serve to induce smooth, harmonious relations and good feelings between the participants.

Congruence and continuity between these practices in schools and those in homes, workplaces, and communities make them obligatory occasions rather than additional time and energy burdens that could be eliminated or that require justification. The mutually reinforcing nature of certain cultural values, structures, roles, protocol, rituals, forms of behavior, obligations, and expectations form a cohesive overall structure. The remainder of this chapter reviews the students' weekly studies, responsibilities, and extracurricular activities and closes with a description of the annual school calendar, a source of further variety in each school week.

4.4 School Week Continued: In the Classroom

Once the assembly is over or the morning bell rings, students know they have about 10 minutes to report to class, organize their belongings, and prepare for first-period studies. They seem to have a built-in time clock for readying themselves. Nearly every period, I observed what seemed to be disorganization and chaos become relative order within minutes. The classroom of randomly moving bodies carrying on similarly random conversations and quips became relatively quiet students who were sitting and adjusting books and materials for the next period. Similarly, each period began with a student or the teacher trying to get attention amidst a cacophony of sounds, and surprisingly, without any teacher reprimands or yelling, within 1 minute the noise hushed to tolerable levels and I could hear once again. Mr. Seki's class assumed a more quiet demeanor more quickly than Mr. Ito's class. In my observation notes, I often missed Mr. Ito's beginning words even though I sat near his desk most of the time. Mr. Ito also had a reputation for having the noisiest class in the school.[11]

To begin each day in Mr. Seki's class, two student *toban* (one boy and one girl)[12] came to the front of the room to conduct the morning meeting. Like the whole-school assembly, they began the classroom assemblage with

"*Ki o tsuke*!" Students responded by standing up, pushing in their chairs, and standing behind their desks. Most *toban* continued quickly to the morning greetings, though stricter *toban* reprimanded fellow students who were not paying attention or who were not standing properly. They, too, repeated the process if too much disorder reigned. Once the desired attention was sufficient, the *toban* said, "*Ohayoo gozaimasu*," and bowed to the class. The rest of the students chimed in and bowed, and the teacher responded in turn. The whole exchange took only a minute and ran rather routinely. A quick class meeting followed to remind students of the day's activities, to ask if anyone had any issues or other news to report, and to let other student monitors announce reminders and requests. They ended the meeting by giving the floor to the teacher and sitting down. Mr. Seki used his time to make announcements, present problems raised in the morning teachers' meeting, organize future activities, praise accomplishments, and set expectations. He had students write reminders to themselves in their memo notebooks.

For the remainder of the day, *toban* were responsible for beginning and ending each period with set phrases. To begin a class period, they said, "*Ki o tsuke*!" and after a slight pause or after mentioning some names to attract attention, they said, "We will now begin the first (or second, third, etc.) period. *Rei* (give thanks)." In response, students bowed while seated at their desks. At the end of the period, they said, "The first period is now over. *Rei?* Idiosyncratically, some students actually bowed distinctly, or some were silly and bowed so deeply that their heads hit the desk, but most were busy with other thoughts and managed a slight dip of the head at best. *Toban* also were responsible for maintaining the class diary: listing the day's schedule and noting tardiness and absences, class problems, issues, or accolades, along with how well cleaning was done. Usually, students wrote

as little as possible, such as “nothing new” or “as usual,” but a few explained difficulties with soliciting student cooperation, expressed disappointment, or noted areas for improvement.

In contrast, Mr Ito did not follow many of the above procedures. *Toban* did begin the morning greetings, but they did not come to the front of the class. They whispered or mumbled, “*Ki o tsuke*,” and students would begin to stand before I had heard anything. Their “*Ohayoo gozaimasu*” was less pronounced and more a matter of course, though sometimes Mr. Ito admonished their lethargic greeting and made them start over. Students rarely scolded each other about their attention or postures. They did not conduct a daily meeting, and they had no class diary for recording daily events. They also did not start and end each period with set phrases. Mr. Ito simply began to talk to open the class period and announced when the period was over. Each morning, like Mr. Seki, he made announcements to organize the day, set expectations, praise accomplishments, and deal with problems raised in the teacher meeting, but he never explicitly had children write reminders to themselves. He relied more heavily on students’ memories and on their mutual reminders. The *toban* did update the daily class schedule and write reminders on the side blackboard.

These daily rituals that begin and organize each day last for just about 10 minutes. Both classes had a similarly remarkable success rate in remembering their books, materials, uniforms, homework, and equipment for each day, and both classes had the usual culprits who forgot something. A look at the variety of subject matter studies and activities reveals the countless details that need to be remembered.

4.5 Subject Matter Studies

Nine subject matters form the core of the fifth-sixth-grade curriculum: art, home economics, Japanese, mathematics, moral education, music, physical

education, science, and social studies. Fifth- and sixth-grade class schedules must work around shared science lab, art, music, home economics, and playground/gym spaces, so every class has a different schedule each day (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2 in Chapter 3). Even when subjects can be scheduled at the same time, many teachers purposefully vary the times. Part of the rationale is to prevent boredom from having the same schedule every day, but it also reflects a belief that all subject matters form an integral part of the education of each student and that students need to learn to concentrate at all hours of the day.

No subject matter or activity is eliminated in favor of another unless a special event is approaching. In my observations, academic subject times were sacrificed to prepare for music, art, drama, or physical education special events; however, the latter subject matters and special events were never eliminated or interrupted to make up time in Japanese, social studies, science, or mathematics. When asked a hypothetical question about what to eliminate to free up time in their schedules, teachers suggested reducing the academic content to allow more time for individualized instruction. No teacher specified eliminating any events, activities, or nonacademic subject time.

When teachers bend the schedule to incorporate their special interests, they emphasize art, music, moral education, interpersonal skills, and experiential activities that enhance the regular academic curriculum. Mr. Seki followed the posted schedule and curriculum more closely than Mr. Ito.[13] Mr. Ito often brought in his own social studies and language arts materials to supplement the textbook. One graduate student remarked that the history lesson handouts contained information usually covered in high school. Mr. Ito also finished lessons early several days each week and his class sang all kinds of music for 10 minutes or longer.

Mr. Seki added music only in preparation for an event, using minimal instruction time. He supplemented subject matter studies in tandem with fellow fifth-grade teachers. I recorded only one observed instance of additional materials to supplement math instruction, and no poetry study occurred. A few times intricate craft items were made for upcoming sixth-grade good-bye parties and graduation. The fewer instances of supplemental activities may be due to the timing of observations. The end of the school year is the busiest time for fifth graders, who must prepare for final exams and for the graduation ceremony.

Japanese and math are unquestionably important and take precedence in the minds of most teachers, students, and parents, but not to the extent that they would eliminate other activities to improve academic performance. To the contrary, teachers and parents marveled at excellence in art exhibitions, choral performances, and other presentations. The top choices for what they wanted students to learn by elementary school graduation were social goals, such as getting along well with peers, having a cheerful personality, and being a kind, considerate person.

The main way to accomplish these goals is through universal, equal, and mutual participation. Universal participation is one hallmark of Japanese egalitarian sentiments that is foremost on teachers' minds in their daily classroom decisions. Regardless of student conduct, achievement, or perceived ability,[14] all students participate in all subject matters, field trips, recesses, events, ceremonies, and extracurricular activities. Rewards and punishments rarely involve granting special privileges or denying participation. Many classroom norms and role assignments allow for or even demand mutual consultation, assistance, and interdependence. This surface equality of form, rewards, and formal participation structures is a crucial metaphor for connectedness—the main entry point of belonging for

students. While admirable in its initial intent for equity, these structures allow for inequity to persist for those who do not conform or who need different kinds of resources. Equality cannot accommodate everyone's needs, yet making special cases to accommodate individual needs is potentially damaging to the sense of community and belonging based on equality: a delicate balancing act, two sides of the same coin.

Such universal participation is all the more remarkable considering the amount and variety of studies, activities, and events necessary to complete the school year. Just listing some of the content and skills to be learned in each subject matter attests to the diversity of intellectual and representational forms that students experience in their schooling alone (see Ministry of Education, 1983).

By the end of sixth grade, presumably all students have learned an impressive array of the basics in many academic and nonacademic areas. Besides being able to read and write at least a thousand Japanese characters, they have begun to gain a feel for and to produce different literary styles, sentence composition, word origins, and levels of Japanese language. In the areas of expression and comprehension, they have started to develop their abilities to research, distinguish between fact and opinion, detect a writer's viewpoint, identify themes, and appreciate and write expressive description.

In social studies, they have many opportunities to read maps, charts, and graphs, and by the fifth and sixth grades, they have covered Japanese geography and have studied about the contributions of various workers and industries to their lives. Agriculture and fishing industries form the basis of fifth-grade studies. Students learn about resource and population distribution, climate, transportation networks, pollution, and conservation. Sixth graders study Japan's cultural and historical heritage and democratic political system.

In mathematics, fifth and sixth graders learn to calculate with fractions and decimals, and to calculate volume, speed, and areas of geometric figures. They learn about algebraic expressions, congruence, and symmetry, and continue to learn to read a variety of tables and graphs, using estimation, rounding off, and percentages.

Science includes textbook learning related to weekly science lab experiments and hands-on activities. In fifth and sixth grades, children study living things and the environment, matter and energy, and earth and the universe. For the former, they study seeds, grow beans or other plants, study fructification, and observe fish hatching. They study how the body works, and they learn about oxygen and water. For matter and energy, they learn about conservation of matter, solutions, acids, and gases. They do experiments using Bunsen burners, and study flame properties and heat conduction. Other areas of study involve light paths, reflection and refraction, sound waves, electromagnetic forces, and electricity. Lastly, they study the movement of the stars and sun, climate variation, and strata formation. In general, they sharpen their observation skills, reinforce other subject matter study, and refine their precision drawing techniques.

Students can read music and play two or three instruments, usually the recorder and an instrument resembling a small piano keyboard (*kenban*), but to produce sound, students blow into a windpipe as they press the piano keys. Some students also learn the harmonica, accordion, and/or some percussion instrument such as the xylophone or drums. They play in duets, ensembles, and band. Part of their studies review Japanese and Western musicians' and composers' backgrounds, and they can identify all the instruments in an orchestra, as well as the names of famous composers such as Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, and Tchaikovsky. They have listened to or even played works such as the *William Tell Overture*, *Peer Gynt Suite No. 1*,

and the *Piano Quintet in A Major Opus 114 "Trout*," the fourth movement. They sing songs in unison, rounds, and two- and three-part harmony. Songs range from traditional Japanese folk songs to *Edelweiss*. This is just the minimum music program for students by their sixth-grade graduation.

In art, they have worked with a wide range of materials: paints, clay, wood, cardboard, and paper. While painting with acrylics, watercolor, or tempera, they have also been taught mechanics of perspective, line, shadowing, and the use of color. They have used different kinds of clay to produce representations of archaeological figures that were studied in social studies, a sculpture of their own choosing, and a bust. They learn to use art tools for woodworking and woodblock printing. They can construct models, wind toys, books, posters, and puzzles; and they can draw self-portraits, human bodies, detailed plants, and still-life compositions.

They have also learned the fundamentals in several sports, such as gymnastics, soccer, basketball, softball, swimming, track and field, and dance, along with a regimen of warm-up and cool-down exercises. In home economics, they have acquired basic knowledge in nutrition, safety, cooking, clothing, sewing, mending, embroidery, washing clothes, cleaning house, and budget planning so that they can plan menus and make items from patterns, with the overall goal of making "family life happy with cooperation" (Ministry of Education, 1983, p. 95) and "[living] systematically" (p. 98).

From first through sixth grades, I observed outstanding artwork, social studies, and science projects, and notebooks filled with notes, outlines, and reflections that exhibited attention to organization, color, and detail; and if teachers took the time to practice singing, even just for 10 minutes several days a week, choral excellence was not unusual. Considering that every student participated—not just select ones—and IQ and achievement test

scores ranged from very low to very high, these accomplishments were the result of something more than innate ability. In fact, in school after school, I marveled at accomplishments that were a product of repeated practice, detailed instruction, observant eyes, alert ears, attentive bodies, and careful hands. Such frequency convinced me that mastering any of the nine subject matters is not simply a matter of talent. With time, patience, the right attitude, and motivated efforts, everyone could sing, compute, read, perform athletic stunts, and draw. In each project, the end products ranged in quality, but the average level of achievement was appreciably high.

When efforts are combined, the strength and impact of the whole are unquestionably greater than each of the individual parts. Some projects are a wonderful mix of individual, small-group, and whole-group efforts, and they occur in every subject matter. For example, the art exhibition might contain individual projects and small-group projects, such as six people collaborating to produce one large painting. The exhibition is set up in the gymnasium by classroom group, and the whole school examines everyone's work. In the process of learning how to combine strengths to accomplish feats not possible as individuals, students refine their interpersonal skills, particularly their teaching and learning skills. Through all their studies, they learn to be systematic and thorough, and they learn how to assume responsibilities and organize themselves.

In part, the above skills and values are instilled through moral education. The list of 28 goals for moral education reveals many cultural values emphasized in school programs (see Appendix D). Most teachers do not relegate moral education to the one period required per week. Rather, as a set of moral principles that guide ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, moral education is infused throughout the day and is implemented as issues arise. Teachers actualize these ideas in variable ways with variable impact.

For example, some teachers emphasize neatness and manners, whereas others spend more time on developing trusting relations. Some classrooms exhibit warm, cooperative relations or a relaxed atmosphere, whereas others have more strained relations or a tense atmosphere.

One criticism expressed by teachers and other educators concerned superficial coverage of textbook material. They felt many concepts must be taught quickly in order to ensure textbook coverage by the end of the year. Teachers felt constrained by the overloaded academic curriculum and the excessive student:teacher ratio per classroom, explaining that they had no time to explore concepts in depth, help students who were not managing to keep up, or add materials that might foster deeper understanding or better comprehension for a greater number of students. Although superficial coverage is a legitimate complaint, all in all the lists of goals, content, and skills are commendable, and from my observations, many were accomplished. At the very least, greater achievement occurred than if students had not had the breadth and challenge of high standards.

Importantly, these areas are not seen as the sole responsibility of teachers or parents or students to teach, reinforce, or learn. Everyone must share in the effort. When problems occur, everyone must share the blame and responsibility as well. Pointing to blame something or someone else is easy, a sign of weakness, and not productive, whereas assuming responsibility is more difficult and a sign of strength. Regardless of who is at fault, each individual can assume some responsibility, especially with the aim of rectifying a situation. One apparent value observed in problem-solving meetings is not to speak of others' faults and negligence but rather to reflect on one's own role and possible contributions, and to iterate one's own responsibilities in the affair. The problem solving ends with each person's verbalization of what to do to improve the situation.

To summarize, some of these students may never go to high school, or they may become high school dropouts, but even if they only attend elementary school, they can take pride in an admirable repertoire of knowledge and skills. Their test scores may range from below to above grade level, but they are literate, they can compute, and they have experimented with fundamental science principles. They know about their history, their communities, and the value of work and the contributions of many workers to their lives. They have acquired basic daily life knowledge and skills, and they have developed practical, artistic, musical, and physical skills and sensibilities to be able to pursue lifelong learning in any number of areas. Most praiseworthy is their ability to gain knowledge, ideas, and skills from their peers and other sources, and to embrace the heartwarming rewards and elation embodied in truly whole-group efforts.

4.6 Recess, Lunch, and Class Meetings

The favorite times of the day from the students' perspectives are recess and lunch. Two recesses occur during the day for the entire school: one 15-minute recess after second period and a 20-minute recess after lunch. The small playground is crowded with active bodies, so many games are forbidden. To partially control the activity, grade levels maybe assigned general play areas. No adults police the playground or supervise student play, but teachers may play with their students during recesses or before school in order to strengthen classroom cohesion and create closer rapport. Students consider such playtimes with their teacher very special. If students mentioned that they thought their teacher was "good," when queried further about why, several students mentioned times when the teacher played with them and made school fun.

At Mori, fifth- and sixth-grade boys monopolized the soccer area, and small groups of children played jump rope, dodge ball, tag, or other games.

Everyone was accustomed to wayward balls and people passing through their games and territory. Umi had more students per playground space, so only ball games that took up little space were played. Many students stayed inside the classrooms and hallways to run around, draw in their notebooks, read comics, or gossip. A few students at Umi read books, but teachers did not encourage such behavior. If teachers said anything, they urged students to go outside to play. By student choice, boys and girls rarely played together unless they were teasing each other or teachers had requested that the whole class play together to build group cohesion. At one school, the students sat around for 2 days as a whole group, not playing, just talking. When I asked why they were not on the playground, one student explained that since the teacher felt they were not getting along well enough as a group, they were required to come to a group consensus about one game they would play together the rest of the week and they had not been able to agree yet. By the weeks end, with no teacher intervention, they were playing kickball—the group goal successfully achieved.

As mentioned earlier, students and teachers eat a hot lunch together in their classrooms. Lunch duty is performed by students in their designated groups (called *han*), a duty that rotates weekly. They don the required white hats and white shirts, fetch the lunch carts, serve lunch, and clean up afterward, returning the carts to the appropriate area. Teachers laughed because I wanted to pay for this hot meal and eat with the students just as they did (while they had no choice—enduring hardship, equality for all). However, I found lunch tasty and nutritional. The main dish, vegetable or salad, rice or bread, and dessert come in separate, large metal containers. Main dishes ranged from pieces of fish and chicken to stew-like mixtures over rice or noodles, sometimes accompanied by soup. Students line up to get their trays, plates, and utensils and pass by the student servers to receive

their meal. Mr. Ito's students picked up their milk bottle as they got their lunch, whereas Mr. Seki's lunch *toban* placed a milk bottle on each desk. Students at both schools prepared a tray and placed it on the teacher's desk for the teacher.

During lunch service, Mr. Seki usually graded papers or handled some other business. Mr. Ito usually helped serve food to the students. As with other established procedures, Mr. Seki's class followed particular rituals that I observed in other schools and other classrooms at Mori, whereas Mr. Ito followed few of these rituals. At Umi, students ate lunch in their *han* (see Section 4.7); they clustered their desks together for lunch, went to the bathroom, and washed their hands. Students covered their desks with luncheon placemats (a piece of brightly decorated cloth)[15] and had their cloth napkins or handkerchiefs handy. Then they sat chatting, laughing, and teasing until the lunch *toban* called their *han* to line up to receive their meal. Meanwhile, the *toban* was scanning the room, mentioning names of students who were not quiet and not cooperating. Cooperating at this point ideally meant that they were sitting quietly at their desks, backs straight, and hands clasped behind their backs. I never saw a completely quiet *han*. Some students automatically sat in the correct posture, and others never sat in the correct posture, but all *han* were called sooner or later, usually in a matter of minutes.

At Mori, students clamored, danced, and wrestled their way into the halls to go to the bathroom and wash their hands. They lined up whenever they got around to it. They ate at their desks without changing the formation, or they pulled their desks closer to a neighbor. After everyone was served and most were seated, Mr. Ito quickly gave a report on how many second helpings were available and said, "*Itadakimasu*," with the students responding in turn. At Umi, no one started eating until everyone was seated.

The *toban* led grace by bowing and saying, "*Itadakimasu*"[16] and fellow students responded in turn. Again, the ways of bowing and saying,"*Itadakimasu*," were as numerous as the number of students in the room, even though there is a standard, proper form.

Mr. Ito's students enjoyed eating, ate fast, and rarely had leftovers. Seconds were distributed as all scarce resources were: by *jan-ken-po* (a game called rock-scissors-paper in the United States). Students would yell when several were ready to vie for some highly desired food. Interested students rushed to the back of the room. Once gathered together, they decided the number of portions available and huddled into close groupings, often shoulders touching and arms interlocked. As people were eliminated (by losing at rock-scissors-paper), the remaining contenders got louder, more animated, and more closely huddled until the victors were decided with a hearty "Yay!" Meanwhile, students at Umi served themselves seconds, first-come first-served. Slow eaters did not get seconds on desirable items. Though the quality was comparable, they often did not finish their food. Every now and then, Mr. Seki mentioned that the kitchen crew worked hard to prepare meals and that they would be hurt to see so much food returned to the kitchen. The not-so-hidden message was that everybody had to eat some more, and the lunch *toban* would come around to put more food on each persons plate.

Appreciating the hard work and efforts of everyone who worked and studied at school was a common theme I observed everywhere. The value of work and workers in all walks of life and their contributions to students' lives comprise the main thrust of the elementary school social studies curriculum. Teachers (especially in the early grades) prod students to try everything and accolades fall upon those who finish everything on their plates. By the sixth grade, however, teachers do not pay much attention,

although Mr. Ito never had to worry about leftover food. Part of the duties of the lunch student council is to conduct a survey to find out which meals students like the most and the least—one of several ways that students have input into school life.

Lunchtime is one of the chances for teachers to leisurely converse with their students, though proximity usually dictates their conversation partners. Predictably, some students grab the attention, and others are so shy that their voices are never heard. Students yell to the teacher across the room, and teachers just laugh and shake their heads. Mr. Ito sat at his desk in front, as many teachers did, but a fellow teacher rotated to a different *han* each day, and students looked forward to having the teacher eat with their *han*.

Mr. Seki's students conducted a daily class meeting during lunch led by the *toban*. The main purpose of the meeting was to make announcements, remind each other about homework and materials needed for the next day, discuss future plans, and deal with issues or problems. In this manner, they took charge of several class management issues themselves, including conflict resolution. To some extent, by the time teachers must intervene, students have failed in their responsibilities to each other. Minor jousts and conflicts arise daily but are resolved almost as quickly as they erupt. Mr. Ito's students had no such daily meeting, yet they managed themselves and their activities just as well.

Major issues and plans are handled at the weekly class meetings. Students elect classmates as their representatives to run the weekly meetings, usually one boy and one girl. They are fairly adept at restating the issue, asking for other opinions, calling on students if no one is offering information, summarizing the discussion, and asking for a vote if one is necessary. An elected secretary is at the blackboard writing down the major

items under discussion or decisions made, and one of the student leaders is recording the minutes in a notebook. Ideally, teachers never have to say anything, and sometimes they wander in and out of the room attending to their own business, but during critical moments or major decisions they may guide the discussion. In my observations, the teachers sometimes commented directly about the issue at hand, but more often they would make an indirect comment like, “Are you sure you have thought through all the issues?” or “This is your meeting. Have we heard from everyone?” Even a sigh, a grunt, or a pause to look at the board would clue students in on the teacher’s feelings.

In general, I was impressed by the ability of students to run meetings, to make decisions, and to organize and take charge of running events. One reason they do this so well by the fifth and sixth grades is because they get so much practice in earlier grades and because so much of their school life is learning to work together in groups. Repeated practice in *hansei* (reflection) develops both intellectual and interpersonal awareness and skills. As a powerful teaching and learning tool, *hansei* is an ever-present act that focuses attention on the process (covered in more depth in Chapter 6).

4.7 Grouping Patterns: Roles and Responsibilities

Cooperative teaching and learning is not a separate, specially designated type of teaching process as it is in U.S. settings. Thus, it is not a teaching strategy or technique that a person decides to implement at a particular time for a particular subject matter activity. Instead, as an ongoing process of interpersonal relations that places primary concern on mutual assistance and on consideration of the involvement and well-being of fellow classmates, cooperative teaching and learning is basically the Japanese way of interacting (connectedness), and, as such, is an ever-present mode of

operations in Japanese classrooms. *Cooperative* is the ideal mode of operating, whereas in reality numerous conflicts, competitiveness, and resentments exist and need to be negotiated, tempered, or resolved. Rather than "cooperative learning," I prefer to use the term *mutual learning* or *mutual instruction* because it is a mutual process of togetherness even though it may not always be truly cooperative. Whatever the terminology, an important feature of Japanese classrooms is that this same process ensures effective classroom management, and its success depends on innumerable grouping patterns that vary in size, duration, and means of selection: by chance, by student preference, by seating patterns, and rarely, by teacher designation.

Han form the core unit of classroom organization for doling out responsibilities, for forming cooperative study groups, and often for bestowing rewards (praise) and punishments (criticism). Several different grouping patterns exist, but the basic *han* is determined by the seating configuration: clusters of about six people each. *Han* are designated by number—for instance, *han* #1, *han* #2, and so forth—and the number of *han* per classroom depends on the number of students, usually about six or seven *han*. This basic *han* unit is used for lunch and cleaning duties, studies, and class management.

Han change whenever the seating configuration changes, which is at the teacher's discretion: Mr. Seki liked to change once a month, whereas Mr. Ito changed once or twice a trimester. Mr. Ito used a chance game to decide who sat where. Mr. Seki kept rows together but rotated them from side to side. Or for an overall change, he gave the students 10 minutes and they could sit wherever they chose. Any conflicts had to be settled by whatever means the students decided, but they only had 10 minutes or Mr. Seki

would decide. I observed this change once and was surprised at how smoothly it occurred. Mr. Seki did not have to intervene.

Sometimes teachers form different impromptu groupings for studies, field trips, and other activities, and they let students form their own groups. Since Umi and Mori have art, music, and home economics specialists, students have different *han* for studying those subjects. Science lab provides still another chance for a new seating pattern in both classes, and Mr. Seki's class had different *han* for physical education.

Other grouping patterns are determined by role assignment. These are not referred to as *han*, but their duties are a vital means for delegating school and classroom management responsibilities and for developing leadership skills. Student councils (discussed below) and classroom monitors (*kakari*) are two such assignments. In general, council and class monitor assignments change only once or twice per year. Students volunteered for each assignment, and if there were more volunteers than slots available, Mori students decided by *jan-ken-po* or another chance game, and Umi students decided by elections or by chance.

Two significant features of these assignments are that they are rarely teacher designated and that they are always done as groups. Without exception, each student is a member of some group. Equitable distribution of assignments and groupings by chance or by rotation results in multiability groups not distinguishable by any status dimensions.[17] The crucial by-product of these multiple and multiability groupings is that students learn to work with their classmates as equals. Teacher favoritism or perceived student behaviors and capabilities do not factor into role assignment. This equality is supported by an influential, pervasive whole-school norm that students are not labeled or categorized to separate them in any way, especially not ability grouping.

Assigning duties in groups increases interdependence: students must collaborate to perform their duties. Classroom norms allow for (hence, the louder noise levels) and demand mutual consultation and assistance. Evaluations of group processes occur regularly, both by teachers and by peers, as individuals and as a group. Again, refining *hansei* (reflective evaluation) is one habit of mind and heart that is developed with care and applied throughout schooling and adult life. In publicly sharing views and problem solving, such self-supervision and peer management is made possible.

Inevitably, some *han* work well together and others have difficulties. Teachers admitted that occasionally they have to change students, but they usually refrain, since a fundamental part of the learning process is for students to iron out their difficulties and redress mistakes or shortcomings in their performances. Regardless of quality of performance or ability to work together, no changes were ever made in Mr. Seki's or Mr. Ito's classes during the observation time. The students' abilities to cooperate were noticeably pleasant. Naturally, students picked on each other, and in these peer groupings they expressed opinions frankly and freely, so feelings were hurt at times. But their peers had a wonderful instinct for supporting the person whom they detected had been hurt, or the offending party would come around later to apologize or more likely say something positive to alleviate the pain. They had fun while they worked, and certain students predictably did more than others to get their jobs done. Patience along with a high tolerance for mistakes and shortcomings was necessary. When asked about what they liked and did not like about working in *han*, the most frequent criticisms were too much goofing off and having to work with students who did not do their share of the work.

One of the few deliberate status-differentiated assignments is that of *han-cho*,[18] student elected leaders of each *han*. Mr. Seki used *han-cho* for many purposes. Some *han-cho* were responsible for overseeing cleaning duty; others monitored the transition to physical education class and led warm-up exercises. Other student leaders were responsible for lining up in the hall to go to and from special classes (art, music, home economics, and science lab). Two class leaders (one boy and one girl) were responsible for student discipline and keeping order in class. Their duties mainly consisted of trying to quiet students down after recess and after lunch. The usual method was to yell, "Be quiet!" several times, and to call students by name. For repeated failure to respond, the class leader could tell the offender to stand in the back of the room. Once the student(s) stood still long enough, the class leader would tell them to return to their seats. For the boys, it became sort of a game with the same students repeatedly called to the back, usually the leader's friends. During other individual study times, the teacher also invoked the class leaders' disciplining responsibility by making some remark about the noise or simply mentioning the *han-cho's* names. This usually reduced the noise automatically, but leaders sometimes still needed to add their subdued repetitions of "Be quiet" without having to send people to the back.

Mr. Seki's rationale for *han-cho* was to develop leadership skills in students. In contrast, Mr. Ito never used *han-cho* for study or cleaning groups or for discipline. His students organized themselves, led themselves through the hallways, and monitored themselves without specially designated leaders. His rationale was that he did not like the inequality in power relations by having *han-cho* responsible for monitoring their peers. They were all responsible for monitoring each other anyway.

Three aspects of these role assignments and grouping patterns seemed to contribute to positive social relations, peer cooperation, and mutual assistance. First, the organization and duties involved in these roles and responsibilities remain the same from year to year. Second, the students who perform them change frequently or rotate. And third, everyone is involved by virtue of their membership in the classroom and school community, irrespective of any status or ability dimensions. As a result, by the fifth grade[19] enough students have performed each duty that peer cooperation and mutual supervision are not only possible but unavoidable. Students receive help whether they want or need it. In order to experience the benefits of mutual assistance, they must also bear the burden of peers constantly watching over their shoulder. Regardless of personal preference or priorities, they are obligated to sense when timely assistance must be offered. Going to school means togetherness, for better and for worse.

Students learn to regulate their interactions because any mistakes or refusal to cooperate in one venture may return to haunt them in another. Conversely, extra special cooperation and assistance may build “credit” toward another project. Universal involvement with the absence of explicit status distinctions enables potential outcasts to retain their dignity and to share a sense of security and belonging. Despite explicit practices that mitigate against status differences, students are still aware of and create their own status distinctions: strong vs. weak, cool vs. weird, smart vs. dumb. This is one reality that never disappears, but some teachers still put forth Herculean efforts to reduce cliques that interfere with classroom group solidarity, and they sometimes have wonderful results. Differences in classroom cooperation and social cohesion exist due to differential teacher and student efforts. Overall societal and cultural norms support solidarity goals. Three common phrases and goals set in schools are “combine our

strengths" (*chikara o awasete*), "make our hearts one" (*kokoro o hitotsu*), and "get along well with others" (*naka yoku suru*).

In sum, these monitor duties and grouping patterns support—in fact, enable—academic learning in several major ways. They provide specific opportunities to employ textbook concepts and skills in actual practice. Students have additional avenues to learn about their own and their classmates' strengths and weaknesses beyond grades and test scores. Student motivation and effort are enhanced by meaningful contributions to the group. And students develop their abilities to plan, organize, remember, make decisions, and problem solve individually and as a group.

When interpersonal relations are mutual and working smoothly, the notions of teaching, learning, and cooperative learning are the same. While teaching, one learns; while learning mutually, one teaches. Their success depends on the quality of caring, trusting relations established by and for all participants. These relations depend on reciprocity and require an ever-present awareness of each person's feelings, individuality, inclusion, and contributions. The camaraderie and support may energize and inspire new ideas, teamwork, and individual successes, but other dangers lurk in the background—for example, increased pressures to conform to the group, inhibition of individual expression, limitations placed on self-confidence, limited independence to select a different path, and personal sacrifices (desires, time, and energy) for others' benefits. Alert and sensitive teachers can ease conditions that may engender extreme forms of bullying. A fine line exists between wholesome group building (that takes advantage of individual character) and repressive group conformity (that denies individuality).

Besides varied subject matter studies, social groupings, and interdependent roles that diversify each day, extracurricular activities

enliven the school week.

4.8 Extracurricular Activities and Responsibilities

The school week is not complete without the regularly scheduled extracurricular activities and responsibilities for all fourth through sixth graders: club activities, student council activities, school work times (for events preparation), and free activity periods. Extracurricular activities occupy the last period of the day on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Each school sets the days for each extracurricular activity. For instance, Umi's club activities are on Monday, and Mori's are on Tuesday. Student councils meet on Tuesday at Umi and on Thursday at Mori. If council meetings are not needed, whole-grade activities or other event preparation times may be scheduled. Despite the extra time and energy burdens, extracurricular activities are not considered "extra." Time allotted to these activities remains unchanged regardless of success or failure in any other aspect of the school program.

Participation is every student's right, not a privilege that may be manipulated for control. No student is denied participation due to behavior or academic problems, and just as importantly, no students receive special attention or rewards for excellent performance. Doing well is its own reward. To isolate a student by denied participation is an extreme form of punishment (see Sections 6.3 and 6.4 in Chapter 6). As one teacher explained, those students who cause the worst behavior problems or who perform least well are the very ones who need the additional opportunities to socialize, to build better relations with teachers and peers, and to take on responsibilities to be able to improve performance and learning. Participation, not isolation, encourages experiences that promote academic achievement, and conversely, denied participation may exacerbate behavior or academic problems. Most significantly, denied participation may disrupt

group solidarity and erode commitment and motivation—two cornerstones of the will to learn. Practically speaking, teachers cannot delay or deny participation because the extra time or absence would infringe on someone else's plans. Schedules and teaching responsibilities form an interconnected, complex web within the Japanese school.

Precisely because students look forward to these enjoyable social activities each day, they are prominent vehicles for developing self-discipline, work ethics, perseverance, motivation, and a will to learn. Hopefully these qualities transfer to other studies.[20] Attention to the five *Ks* is reinforced through these activities. Viewed in the context of an entire year, the activities serve five additional purposes: (1) developing leadership and organizational skills; (2) deepening students' sense of responsibility for each other; (3) building school and cross-grade-level identity by expanding social groupings and interdependence; (4) broadening student experience; and (5) reinforcing academic, artistic, physical, social, and personal skills acquired in other studies. Most telling, teachers valued these interactions beyond homeroom studies as a means to obtain multiple perspectives on and fresh views of their own and other students.

Club activities and student councils require more substantial planning and involvement as described in Sections 4.8a and 4.8b. The types of school work or free activity times differ at each school. Free periods maybe used for any purpose except subject matter study. Many schools add handicrafts or other enjoyable activities. Umi had free play periods on Thursday and Friday, and Mori had them on Monday and Friday. As mentioned earlier, Mori used more of its times for events preparation. In general, Mr. Seki allowed students more free play, since their after-school schedules entailed so much indoor studying, whereas Mr. Ito filled the time with poetry, singing, and preparation for special events. He and his fellow grade-level

teacher added a performance day (*happyokai*) to the schedule. Combined as a whole-grade-level event, this day gave the students a chance to show their parents what they were learning: physical education skills, dance, poetry recitation, band, and choral singing.

4.8a Club Activities

Clubs break down into two basic types: sports clubs (e.g., ping-pong, soccer, basketball, unicycle, badminton) and cultural clubs (e.g., cooking, history, cartooning, sewing, music, crafts, science). All teachers (homeroom and specialists) sponsor a club and usually team teach. Schools offer different clubs, but within a school the same clubs are generally offered from year to year. Variation occurs depending on the expertise and preferences of the teachers. At Mori and Umi, students participate in two clubs per year, selecting one from each type. Mori has fewer clubs because it is a smaller school.

Club activities serve many purposes. First, the activities are a welcome break from the more structured, fast-paced academic studies, and they help to identify school as a place to have fun while learning. Second, they offer one of the few opportunities for students to select an activity on the basis of their own personal interests. In other activities, students may have some freedom to choose a topic, but the overall structure is given and opportunities for independent study are rare. Third, students get to know teachers and students from other classes and grade levels. And fourth, students can expand their direct experience in a wide array of skills and activities.

The Japanese have many different words for experience, but educationally speaking three terms disclose a fascinating way they perceive the difference in experience. One is *kemmon* or *kembun;* the word is a combination of the two *kanjiy* “to see” and “to hear.” This is the experience

through the eyes and ears, meaning experience, observation, and information. Another word is *keiken*, which is experience through the passing of time, and it is also used for empirical science or experimental science. The third word is used in contrast to *keiken* and signifies experience through the total body: *taiken*. The two *kanji* for *taiken* are the words for "body" and "testing," so investigation through actual experience involving the whole body and all its senses is a more inclusive way to experience. Several principals and teachers remarked that the more important way to experience for true learning is *taiken*. The significance of the total body in learning is recognized in Japanese educational thought and underlies much of the educational practice I observed.[21] Club activities are critical for *taiken*.

Students sharpen relevant skills and explore individual interests in an informal atmosphere. Except for large ball games that need teacher referees and group projects that require some formal instruction, teachers tend to play alongside students or spend the time socializing with students as they work independently on their projects. Students work at their own pace, sitting with friends, helping each other, constantly chattering and laughing. Such informal opportunities for teachers to be with students are vital for nurturing *kizuna* (emotional attachment, a touching of the hearts) and the individual relations that become the conduits for stronger teaching-learning bonds. The cross-grade, cross-classroom groupings also reinforce interdependence and multiple levels of connectedness.

Though most clubs are coeducational, numbers of boys and girls can be uneven because students select their clubs. For example, the sewing club is usually all girls, and girls predominate in the music and cooking clubs, whereas soccer remains largely a boys' club. Other sports clubs, such as basketball, badminton, tennis, ping-pong, and unicycle, are mixed. As with

other studies and activities, students must remember to bring their gym uniforms and project materials to be able to fully participate.

4.8b Student Council Activities (Iinkai)

Through student councils, students oversee areas of school life, such as school lunch, health, athletics, maintenance, library, school assembly, student guidance, broadcasting, and caring for live animals. Councils are work committees that engage students in running and maintaining their school. Each council has representatives from each fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade class.

In a marvelous way, school becomes not just a place or a building with people inside but a process defined by and for the students. By sharing responsibilities for various parts of school life, “school” becomes a shared phenomenon distributed among each and every student. Each council elects sixth-grade leaders who are responsible for calling the meeting to order and conducting business. Teachers monitor council activities, but ideally students discuss issues and construct plans by themselves with teachers merely present for guidance when necessary. In my observations, leaders ran the meetings quite capably. Not surprisingly, few students spoke up voluntarily during discussions, so leaders called on students to solicit opinions. Teachers often stepped in to guide and make suggestions, especially to speed up a process. Importantly, they never decided issues, but they did present issues to provoke further discussion and decision-making options for the students. In the same way that group work distributes intelligence in their studies, these extra groups distribute leadership capacities, intelligence, and school ownership among all students.

Students’ abilities to speak in front of large gatherings and to run whole-school assemblies and other events are impressive. Through these occasions, students gain practice in public speaking and show much poise

in front of the microphone. Beginning with first grade, students have several opportunities to speak in front of whole-school audiences. The broadcasting student council learns how to use the PA system, how to set up the microphones and other electronic equipment, and is responsible for setting up, monitoring, and taking care of the equipment during all school assemblies.

In summary, the variety of duties, activities, social groupings, and subject matters means that students and teachers have abundant details to keep track of: times, places, materials, procedures, rules, and fellow student obligations. As an outsider, the number of details seems mind-boggling, but to these students so much has been highly ritualized and engrained from years of practice that they barely have to think about what they are doing and where each item is: *katachi de haeru, karada de oboeru*. They enter through form; they remember with their bodies.

From the student point of view, such variety keeps each day lively: different academic subjects are interspersed with nonacademic subjects and activities, lunch, recesses, and cleaning. Lectures and drills are punctuated by plentiful opportunities for body movement and activities requiring skills in diverse representational and social forms. This diversity necessitates detailed preparation, a degree of compliance, and hard work in order to enjoy the benefits.

Interestingly enough, with this variety, the same subject taught in a similar fashion each day can be gratifying consistency in an otherwise ever-changing schedule. Sitting to concentrate on reading or rote drills is a welcome relief from the other physical activity, and individual seat work is a nice respite from interdependence required in other activities. Even though regularly scheduled activities make each week feel busy, throughout the year, each week also brings another event or preparation for one. These

events and ceremonies invigorate an already full schedule. Some annual activities are highlights to each school year, and for sixth graders the events maybe the culmination of their elementary school experience.

4.9 The School Calendar

Japanese students go to school 240 days compared with 180 days for U.S. students. By extrapolation, many then assume this means more time spent in academic studies, which therefore accounts for higher achievement levels. However, the U.S. Department of Education report (1987, p. 10) made adjustments for the ceremonies, special events, and half days and indicated that the regular academic school days are closer to a full-time equivalent of 195 days for Japanese schools. Based on my findings, if the number of hours and days spent in preparation for those special days is included, the figure spent on actual academic class time may be similar in both countries (see Appendix A).

Thus, rather than increased subject matter study, the noteworthy difference is 45 more days of special events, ceremonies, and extracurricular activities. Contrary to conventional reasoning, the longer year may contribute to greater achievement not because of more time spent on academic studies but because of an emphasis on nonacademic activities that are deemed insignificant or “soft” subjects in U.S. educational thought.

Their significance cannot be overstated, however. As this section demonstrates, these events, activities, and ceremonies are central to promoting the multiple layers of connectedness fundamental to strong community building and inclusion for all students. In providing numerous avenues for repeated cycles of planning, performance, and reflection, students increase achievement in a wide range of skills, including invaluable academic skills and habits of mind. Student achievement rises to the level of each opportunity to perform regardless of the mode of

presentation. Students' first-time achievements sometimes came when they performed for an outside audience as they rose to each occasion. The most memorable time was Mori's sixth-grade cooperative stunt for sports day, the "Tokyo tower," in which students on the bottom level stood in a circle, arms on each other's shoulders, the second-level students climbed up and stood on their shoulders, and the lightest student climbed up to become the third level. Six groups of students had to build this "tower" and at practice could never perform it simultaneously. Amazingly, on a gravel playground, all six groups successfully completed their towers together for their parents and fellow students at the whole-school sports day. For parents, these kinds of performances present a more informative and realistic range of accountability measures than test scores alone.

Many special events honor various types of relations between members of the school community. Some serve basic instructional or record-keeping purposes, such as health exams, safety instruction, and emergency drills. Others (e.g., field trips, sports days, cultural festivals, and school picnics) provide direct experiences and practical application of knowledge and skills learned in subject matter study. Most are thoroughly enjoyable and help build close-knit groups. Several annual whole-school events attract large crowds of families, who also participate and enjoy the students' accomplishments. Most events made me wish that I was an elementary student.

Within many events, multiple forms of cooperative groupings are promoted in ingenious ways. Sports day provides a fine example. Sports day participation for each student involves an individual running race, small cooperative group competitions, a whole-grade-level cooperative event, and a whole-school event. Clever relays and cooperative ventures combine art, music, dance, sports activities, and a sense of humor. For example, the

teachers and staff competed as two teams, and each teacher on a team had a piece of clothing. The vice principal and principal stood at one end of the field, and the objective of the relay teams was to dress their “model” the quickest. As the administrators were “dressed,” the folktale characters they represented became obvious. Once adorned with their costumes, they paraded around the field with their respective teacher teams.

How do students experience these events through the course of a school year? The school year begins in April with the opening school ceremony, a morning assembly conducted much like the weekly opening assemblies except the principal’s speech is solemn and longer and everyone sings the school song. Each trimester opens and closes with a whole-school assembly that includes singing the school song. Students stand in anxious anticipation on the first day, however, because this is when they meet new teachers and students and when they find out who their teacher will be. At Umi and Mori, only the third and fifth graders change teachers and classroom groupings; the other classes change teachers only if their teacher from the previous year has been rotated out of the school.[22]

Because students are not informed in advance, they do not have a chance to say good-bye and to show their appreciation to those who have left. In a nice gesture, in Mori’s district, any administrators, staff, and teachers who left the school return to be honored in a good-bye ceremony at a later date. On this day, the students present thank-you/good-bye letters to the honorees who are sitting on stage. Each of them, in turn, gives a quick speech to the assembled students, usually praising students and reflecting on fond memories. One returning kitchen staff mentioned how disappointed she was that students at her new school returned so much food and how happy Mori students made the kitchen staff because they ate most of their food.

The entrance ceremony is the most important event for first graders. It occurs after the opening school ceremony and officially marks their first day of school. Prior to this day, even though school has not officially begun, sixth graders have reported to school to set up the gym and learn their roles for participation. Sixth graders are designated “big brothers” and “big sisters,” and they assist first graders’ assimilation into school. Introducing students to school life is a step-by-step process. In the days before the entrance ceremony, incoming first graders meet their teachers, learn where their desks are, and receive their name badges and school hats. They also practice the ceremony so that they know what to expect. Sixth graders help with this introduction, and they eat lunch with and play with first graders each day for the first few weeks of school. First graders love this extra attention, and I was pleasantly surprised with how well the “bullies” I had been observing worked so nicely with their “little brothers and sisters.”

Parents accompany their children to school for the entrance ceremony. As they arrive, they get their picture taken in front of the school with its special entrance ceremony banner adorning the gate.[23] First graders meet in their classrooms while other students (only the second and sixth graders at Mori) assemble in the gym. Teachers and staff file into their designated area to the left of the stage, and the PTA and other education officials sit in their designated area to the right of the stage. Parents and other guests sit in the center behind an empty section of seats reserved for the most important group, the first graders. At the appropriate time, the first graders march into the gym with their teachers and file into their seats. Mori second graders learned some instrumental songs to play for the first graders to welcome them to the school, a ceremony that was meant for them just the year before. The principal, the PTA chairperson, and other dignitaries give

speeches to the students to explain what an important experience school will be.

Because April is the beginning of the school year, besides these ceremonies and health exams that interrupt the classroom schedule, many schools sponsor whole-school or whole-grade-level picnics (*ensoku*). This gives the new group a chance to have fun together and to form more solid bonds as a group—another way to build grade-level and school identity. Umi is a large school, so it sponsors separate grade-level picnics, whereas Mori's whole school goes to a park for food and games on one day.

Unlike most schools that have their traditional sports day in October, Mori's is in May, so there are daily preparations. Meanwhile, Umi's schedule is filled with safety instruction days, a parent observation day, dental exams, and a games day. Sometime in April or May, schools will also spend part of another day conducting a whole-school emergency drill. At Mori, the fire department came to demonstrate the use of the fire extinguisher and how they rescue students from the roof by ladder and from the upper-story classrooms by fire slide. Afterward, younger students used the opportunity to draw fire engines as their art project. Even the first-grade teacher was teaching perspective and shadowing to her first-grade students, who noticed that the top of the ladder appeared to be narrower than the bottom as it extended into the sky and that the red where the sun shone was a brighter, lighter red than that in the shadows.

Annual home visits are conducted in April or May. School dismisses early so that teachers can visit each student's home. Most parents and teachers reported that these 10- to 15-minute visits were more social than serious.

June signals the beginning of summer. For Umi sixth graders, this means their 3-day "outdoor classroom" to Hakone, a beautiful mountain area near

Mount Fuji. The principal, sixth-grade teachers, and a few other teachers accompanied the approximately 120 students on this trip. Schools are affiliated with some large recreational facility in an area near historic sites, hiking, camping, seashore, or other outdoor activity areas. Students look forward to this trip because no parent chaperones attend, and they are crowded into open *tatami* (woven reed) mat rooms that can fit as many as 10 students sleeping head to toe. The sleeping area is like a big dormitory with rooms off long hallways. Teachers are nearby but in a separate area. One night is spent in a campground sleeping in tents and cooking on an open fire. Each day is filled with field trips to historic sites, boat rides, hiking, and outdoor activities. They may have exercise, discussions, and games in the evening, and students enjoy the traditional bath time and sleepless nights.

Mori's overnight "outdoor classroom" occurs in September, but sixth graders have a special music appreciation day and a theater day in June. These entail day-long field trips to attend concert and theater productions. Both schools open their pools at the end of June. At Mori, this involved several school workdays of cleaning and preparing the pool for the big day. Swimming instruction does not begin without the traditional pool opening ceremony to pray for the safety and well-being of all students.

July brings hot, humid weather to Tokyo along with shortened school days.[24] Classes are dismissed after lunch. The fifth graders look forward to their overnight trip, the first of many they will take with their peers—one trip each year through high school.[25] Traditional holidays are incorporated into the event schedule, and in July the assembly committee plans a *Tanabata* festival celebration. The regular classroom schedule is interrupted by swim instruction and planning for summer vacation. As mentioned in Chapter 3, most Umi students attend intensive *juku*, so teachers only expect

attendance for swim instruction. Mori students schedule times to clean their neighborhood, study, and play together. Parents meet after an observation day to discuss neighborhood safety patrols and other activities they will sponsor to keep the students busy. July ends with a trimester closing ceremony, and administrators are sure to warn their students to play outside and to maintain their health and safety. August is summer vacation.

The second trimester begins in September with an opening ceremony. Mori sixth graders have a district-wide swimming meet before school officially begins. Then they prepare for their 3-day “outdoor classroom” in Nikko, a historic city in the countryside outside Tokyo. Another set of emergency drills, physical exams, and safety instruction days may occur, and each takes up part of a day. Umi students prepare for their big sports day at the end of September.

In October, both schools’ sixth-grade students participate in their district-wide track meet. Even these large gatherings do not have qualifying times or limit participation to a select group. Like all other activities, everyone participates. Umi students have a 2-day community festival and their science field trip. Mori has a Sunday class observation day, an annual event enabling working parents to observe classroom instruction.

Cultural festival preparations begin with the start of the second trimester, but students, parents, and teachers at Umi and Mori are especially preoccupied the whole month before the big weekend in November. Students and teachers perform or exhibit their work on Saturday (for the whole school) and on Sunday (for families). Each year the event rotates the cultural focus: either a. music performance, art exhibition, or theater production. Thus, students who attend all six grades at the same school will experience two of each kind of cultural festival by the time they graduate. In the same year, however, different schools may sponsor a different

festival. During my observation times, Umi had a theater production day and Mori had an art exhibition, and the following year Umi had an art exhibition and Mori had music performances. Music and drama performances are done as whole-grade-level collaborative efforts. Some schools sponsor another festival in addition to the required one. For instance, one Nagano school has a music performance every year in addition to the rotating cultural festival, and one Osaka school has an annual theater production day focusing on the theme of discrimination (see footnote 14 in Chapter 2).

Mori students also have their social studies field trips (1 full day) in November. Sometime in November or December, individual parent-teacher conferences are held, including consultations regarding children's health. December ends with vacation schedule planning, goal setting for the new year, and one whole-school massive cleaning day. I did not witness Umi's cleaning day, but at Mori, every classroom had to remove all desks and floor items in order to wash and wax the floors. Students were crawling in every nook and cranny and stepping on ladders to clean in corners, on ledges, and in every locker. No space was left untouched. New Year is the time when families do their big house cleaning, so schools conveniently reinforce this cultural event. The trimester ends as always with the whole-school assembly.

Students greet each new year in January with the traditional "first-of-the-year" calligraphy writing (*kakizome*) and art exhibition. Special Japanese characters or phrases are selected, and students deftly stroke their writing onto large scrolls of rice paper to open the year with good luck. Teachers judge the most artistically painted calligraphy and affix a gold sticker to each award-winning calligraphy paper.

Mori sponsors an unusual sports event, the *takeuma undokai* (stilts sports day). The literal translation of *takeuma* is bamboo horse, which is much more descriptive and meaningful than *stilts*. Students make their own pair of stilts from bamboo, then learn how to walk and run on them. Once adept at running, they practice playing other sports. Every student has to "run" the 50-yard dash. In addition, children may play another sport such as soccer or wrestling. The latter mimics sumo wrestling tradition, and students try to push each other out of the wrestling ring or off their stilts. Instead of the regular sports day division into red and white teams, students are divided into four neighborhood teams based on residence. The event is tremendous fun, but the preparation is even more entertaining.

Sixth graders made an instructional videotape explaining how to make *takeuma*. They play the videotape for the whole school during lunch, then all teachers and older students spend several school workdays preparing the bamboo to make the *takeuma*. During recess and before school, students practice. They set up a "*takeuma* hospital" where students repair broken *takeuma*. Racks for tethering *takeuma* line the school yard. Excitement builds along with *takeuma* riding skills. By the day of the event I attended, everyone could walk or run the 50 yards, except for a few first graders who spent more time on the ground than on their *takeuma*, but they made it to the finish line laughing all the way!

Fifth and sixth graders spend much of February preparing for the biggest event: graduation day. Many hours of practice and organization are required to guard against any mishaps. Umi has social studies field trips and a "clubs presentation day" for students to display their club achievements. March winds up the school year with special events for the sixth graders. At Umi, sixth graders have an all-day graduation picnic. At Mori, fifth and sixth graders have a "farewell ball games" day.

Each school sponsors its own form of a thank-you or “showing gratitude” party. Parents, teachers, students, and administrators take turns giving speeches to express their gratitude for others’ efforts and making presentations of gifts and other performances, such as singing. Any teachers who have taught the sixth graders in previous grades try to attend this event and graduation, or at least send telegrams that are read aloud during the event. Many speeches reminisce about past events and humorous happenings of the sixth graders in earlier grades. At Mori, this was much smaller and more informal. The gymnasium was not decorated, and no food was served. Students sang beautiful traditional Japanese folk songs, which brought forth handkerchiefs among the parents. Others recited poetry. In turn, the mothers sang a few songs for their children and for the teachers. Mori students received Japanese-English dictionaries in preparation for beginning their study of English at middle school.

At Umi, the gymnasium was decorated for the event. Students, parents, and teachers sat at tables draped with white tablecloths and were served lunch. In time with background music, as one mother recited past accomplishments and words of thanks, other mothers came up to the stage to draw onto four blank poster boards one stroke per person. In time, one could see that they were drawing faces, and by the end, the four faces were wonderful caricatures of the four teachers of the graduating classes—the parents’ gift to the teachers.

Finally, the school year ends with a school-closing ceremony, followed the next day by the graduation ceremony. The gymnasium walls are covered with the traditional red-and-white wide-striped banners, and the stage is draped with the school and district flags and adorned with a flower arrangement. Local education board dignitaries, past and present PTA presidents, the entire staff, and teachers attend along with the fifth- and

sixth-grade classes and parents of the graduates. Everyone is dressed in fancy attire. The vice principals are the emcees for the ceremony. The fifth graders are the orchestra and perform the processional and recessional music for the sixth graders who file in and out of the gymnasium to loud applause. The occasion is a proud and solemn one that is begun by singing the school song.

Sixth-grade students recite a prewritten speech to thank the appropriate people and reminisce about their past fun-filled 6 years, but rather than having one or a few students speak for the rest, they perform *yobikake*. In this form of speech, individual students recite different phrases (parts of each sentence) one after another, with some phrases announced in unison. In this way, just as in so many events and activities throughout their elementary career, every student has a chance to participate. Fifth-grade students also perform *yobikake* to thank the sixth graders for their leadership and friendship. Although first graders do not attend the ceremony, at Mori a cassette tape made by the first graders was played to thank the sixth graders for all their help.

After the usual speeches (much longer because of the magnitude of this ceremony), the principal ascends onto the stage for the climactic moment, conferring the graduation certificates. As the homeroom teacher announces each student's name, he or she walks to center stage to receive the diploma. From the students' comportment, one can tell this is the most momentous day of their lives, and from the tears and handkerchiefs, it is a proud and emotional one, too.

At Umi, each part of the ceremony was accompanied with much fanfare and formal standing and bowing. The emcee tells the sixth graders when to stand, when to bow, and when to sit. To receive their diploma, certain steps are followed precisely: where to walk, when to exact a crisp turn. Once on

stage, in the center facing the principal, they take one step toward him. After he extends the diploma, they take the left side first, then the right, then bow to a certain degree, holding the diploma high. Finally, they step back, turn crisply, and exit toward the other end of the stage. Diplomas are rolled and inserted into a nice cardboard container. Parents were dressed in impeccable fashion, many with fur coats draped on their arms.

Mori students did not have to stand and bow between each phase, and parents were nicely dressed, but there were more *kimono* and no fur coats. To receive their diploma, students walked up to the stage, a little more self-consciously and with less precision, but just as proud and elated. They received the diploma and bowed, a little more sheepishly, and left the stage as quickly as possible. Their diplomas were rolled and tied with a ribbon. Mori students and teachers added their special contribution at the end. They performed several songs, the highlight being the sixth graders' three-part *Hallelujah* chorus, melodiously filling the gymnasium and bringing many students' and parents' handkerchiefs to their eyes, myself included.

4.10 Interpretation

Kokoro o hitotsu (unite our hearts, or literally, to make our hearts one) is a common refrain throughout elementary school life. The last incident epitomizes this heart, which also symbolizes the heart of the Japanese educational experience in several ways. The graduation ceremony represents the culmination of 6 years of hard work and togetherness. As an emotional centerpiece, tears reveal the meaningfully positive attachment to the total elementary school experience. When asked what the greatest reward of teaching is, Mr. Seki responded, "When you and your students have worked together so hard to reach a goal that when you finally succeed you all cry together." These tears are not a sign of weakness; rather they are an expression of heartfelt feelings so wonderful they cannot be contained.

Tears reflect the strength of bonds in a community and the crowning achievement of hard work, the pinnacle of joy: the five *Ks* (relations, feelings, hardship, experience, heart) personified.

In the ceremony, several significant relations are evident: those between the graduates themselves as a cohort group; those between themselves and their school community; those between *senpai* and *kohai* (in this case, the sixth graders and the first and fifth graders);[26] those between the graduates and their families; and those between the graduates and their teachers, past and present. Identification with multiple levels of communities contributes to ones sense of self. Multiple levels of communities reflected in the graduation ceremony range from individual recognition (diploma distribution) to various subgroups (teachers/staff, parents, grade levels) to the whole school and the community. The graduates have now joined the community of graduates from the school. Relations as bonds that last over time contribute a sense of security in one's web of relations. Elementary school reunions are popular events. Alumni giving to elementary schools is an important source of extra funding, which in part explains the better-quality facilities and materials at Umi even though government funding to public schools is similar.

4.10a Basis for "The Basics"

Rather than the three *Rs*, the main focal point of education in the observed elementary settings seemed to be an emphasis on the four Cs: community, connectedness, commitment, and caring.[27] Coupled with high standards for developing the whole person and a corresponding diversity of educational experiences, the four Cs comprise the most outstanding features imbued with the 5 *Ks* (the Japanese equivalent).

Community exists at many levels in Japan. At a national level, education is much broader than the school system, involving many facets of society

and its institutions integrated into a mutually reinforcing network. Community also has compelling meaning at the school-community interface level and at the level of the school itself as a community of learners. As will be seen in Chapters 5 and 6, *community* is not an easy product of people merely coming together for a common goal; rather it is persistently, carefully, painstakingly, and sometimes painfully worked on every day and on many levels in the process of educating each other.

Connectedness is inescapable, especially in the number and quality of relations between persons and in the strength of bonds established through the teaching-learning process. Other kinds of connectedness are also important: relations between learners and the content, between learners and their environments, between learners and other institutions, and between institutions. Connectedness refers to continuity, too. The power of relations over time and distance strengthens community, commitment, and caring.

Meaningful relations depend on trust, which is founded on a sense of security and a sense of belonging, all of which require commitment: to do one's best, to do so with integrity and through any hardship (*kuroo*). Commitment, first and foremost, must be to other members in one's community, being sensitive to their feelings and needs. This commitment extends to the established goals and to taking responsibility for one's own and others' actions and obligations. Commitment strengthens with reciprocity and with equal, respectful inclusion. Effort, will, and motivation in turn are fostered by commitment. Also a virtue cultivated through daily attention and reassurance, building commitment requires consistency in terms of participation and membership, procedures, and feedback. Such consistency is nurtured by common expectations and genuine concern.

Finally, the cohesive element that binds the connectedness and commitment into productive and meaningful communities is the caring

underlying it all: caring enough to include one's neighbor despite animosity, caring enough to consider everyone's feelings and opinions despite the additional time and self-sacrifice required, caring so much that words are no longer needed to communicate. Ideally, another's needs are anticipated and action and assistance are initiated without having to be asked or told. One essential component in developing and maintaining proper relations is constant attention to *kimochi* (feelings). Eyes, bodies, and hearts absorb and convey thoughts and feelings poignantly. Caring also is a reciprocal act.

Mori students' beautiful rendition of the *Hallelujah* chorus symbolizes the essence of the four Cs. When asked why he had his students sing so often, Mr. Ito replied, "It is the only time when all those different personalities and individual voices combine to become one voice." In song, these students were a community with one voice—a voice that exhibited the strength arising from combined efforts, the strength of intimate togetherness, and the strength of respectful relations (connectedness) between teachers and students to perfect one product. In performing for parents and others in their school community, they moved the hearts of all who listened. Brought forth by commitment and caring, the song also consolidated commitment and caring.

The quality of voice showed me the power of believing that no innate talents or abilities are immutable. Although no single teacher had outstanding results in all areas, teachers enjoyed admirable achievement in areas they emphasized. Likewise, students exerted variable efforts reflected in variable products. And some students with devoted effort will still not be outstanding, but they are successful because the process leading to the product is recognized as a measure of success.

In general, trying one's best is most important, regardless of the outcome.[28] The sincerity and degree of effort, diligence, and consideration

of others are important elements toward developing *kokoro* and therefore are measures of success, as well as the assurance that the product is probably better than if a person had not tried as hard. High standards may be met not by everyone nor in everything but by more than I would have predicted if high standards were not set at all. Importantly, accomplishing them all is not the goal, but striving to meet as many as possible is the main objective. Teachers often reminded students to put forth effort and praised mistakes as evidence of effort, the surest way to learn. Emphasis on the process and on high standards in diverse areas points to the ultimate educational goal: developing the whole person (*ningen*)—a healthy, moral, physical, aesthetic, compassionate, intellectual, and social being.

Essential for the development of *ningen* and *kokoro*[29] are the four Cs. The combination of ideas embodied in the four Cs and five *Ks*, such as sensitive attention to feelings and nurturing togetherness as a means to develop commitment, concentration, and a will to learn, were not considered in my original conceptual framework and are not given much attention in U.S. research. Yet in the end, I wonder if these broader goals and measures for success may produce greater academic achievement and learning than sole attention to knowledge and academics could. In other words, the four Cs and five *Ks* require a curriculum aimed at developing the whole person and as such are the basis for "the basics." Perhaps the three *Rs* are not acquired as quickly, completely, permanently, or surely not as eagerly when not supported by and complemented with the four Cs.[30] Thus, in an interesting twist, the priority of learning the three *Rs* is accomplished by placing an even greater priority on areas not traditionally associated with the three *Rs* in U.S. educational thought, particularly on nonacademic activities, with attention to the emotional and social aspects of the cognitive act (the five *Ks*).

Specific links to cognitive development aside, carefully nurturing the four Cs and five *Ks* undoubtedly contributes to admirable, mutual teaching-learning processes and classroom management patterns, which in turn facilitate concentration on academic work. When the relations between teachers and students are functioning smoothly, classroom management and teaching-learning become one in the same process: that of mutual assistance to facilitate individual and group progress. Also, when cooperative learning is working properly, teaching and learning are inseparable parts of the same process: a mutually constructed dialectic of relations between many participants, not just a linear process with clearly separated teacher and learner roles.

Variety in many forms characterizes these students' lives—another basis for "the basics." It is not a chaotic, unorganized variety that distracts concentration, dissipates energy, or paralyzes progress. Rather it is an energizing variety that is set in predictable structures and forms, emerges from careful planning, and is founded on consistent principles. Within a school day, the variations in intellectual content, social groupings, representational forms, roles, and duties keep students engaged. Diversity in location and timing of subject matter schedules and of extracurricular activities and events across the week further vitalize students' bodies and minds. Ironically, the only way I can imagine such variety continually being offered on such a universal basis is thanks to the standardization of so many practices not eliminated for the sake of individual convenience.

4.10b Becoming a Connoisseur of Standardization with Standards

What was an oxymoron to me before going to Japan turned out to be fundamental to the richness and quality of educational programs I observed: standardized diversity. As opposed to the kind of standardization associated with words like *rote*, *uncreative*, *uniform*, or *rigid*, this standardization

yielded quite the opposite impression: lively engagement, creative spin-offs, and individual responsiveness. An unintended outcome for me was becoming more astute about the positive implications and potential power of standardization.

Standardization with high standards can be exciting and energizing depending on those who give it life through their daily classroom interactions. As I experienced day after day of the nationally controlled, “standardized” curriculum, I was intrigued by the variety that defied simple categorization or description due to ever-changing schedules, activities, and variations across sites. I had no time to become bored, and the same seemed to be true for the students. How does such diversity prosper alongside standardization?

A basic amount of routinization allows teachers to amplify standard forms or add their creative strengths to preestablished content. Rather than reinvent the curricular wheel or expend energy creating the diversity, built-in diversity allows teachers to focus energies elsewhere. They can concentrate on improvements and pay more attention to their students as whole persons: aware of their intellectual, physical, social, moral, psychological, and emotional sides. Standardized procedures, roles, and responsibilities expedite transitions between activities, and the structure allows more students to participate fully in all activities, especially those who may be lost otherwise. More and more responsibilities and activities may be added if consistency in protocol and organization continues across time and place.

The continuity and consistency enable more students, parents, and teachers to cope with the rich variety: common expectations and procedures facilitate organization of time and possessions to remember the vast amount of necessary details and materials. Most importantly, consistency and full

participation enable cooperative work. All participants have gained some expertise from past experience that may be used to help others. Mutual assistance and interdependence cannot be nurtured without some kinds of shared values, experiences, expectations, and processes. Once adjusted to a base level of diversity, individually creative additions give meaning to the process.

Without having to readjust to changing procedures and expectations from year to year, a long-term view and incremental building of skills and knowledge is possible. Students and teachers can concentrate on perfecting prior weaknesses and can build upon and diversify their strengths. Being together as a classroom unit for 2 years reduces time and energy spent on building relations and cohesion as a classroom group. As quoted earlier, one teacher wisely remarked, “The first year, you learn how to work together as a group and understand each other, and the second year, the real learning can begin.”

Moreover, with such complex, interdependent sets of studies, activities, extracurricular events, and work groups, a certain degree of “standardization” without individual choice is imperative. If one teacher, family, or student does not participate, changes the times or modes for their own convenience, or receives special treatment, the tapestry unravels with ramifications across the levels, entangling the web of obligations or disconnecting the connectedness in other ways.

Standardization alone is not a sufficient formula for success, and diversity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for engagement. What injects lively engagement into standardization? The standards must be high, and the areas selected for standardization must be reasonable. Flexible implementation as guidelines, not as dogma, leaves room for human impression and avoids standardized oppression. A combination of high

standards, variety, and flexibility must be accompanied by the enjoyment of togetherness nurtured by the dedication and caring of those involved. Effecive implementation of the standardized curriculum retained the following features for all members in the observed educational communities: (1) engagement (motivation, involvement, and diligence); (2) emotional warmth (enjoyment, excitement, and intimacy); (3) trusting relations built on genuine concern and positive self-esteem; and (4) equity, in the sense of maximum participation and growth in diverse areas along with ample opportunities to receive feedback, demonstrate competence, and experience the rewards of success. Above all, in the process of developing the whole person and the biological senses, four other senses seem essential: common sense, a sense of humor, a sense of security, and a sense of belongingness.

Indeed, to simply say a curriculum or a school system is “standardized” is not truly informative. From this study, I learned that several types of standardization exist with both positive and negative implications. I observed three positive kinds of standardization: standardized diversity, standardized collectivity, and standardized equality. Standardized diversity refers to the diversity already outlined. Without standardized subject matter curricula and standardized processes, responsibilities, events, and ways of organizing schools and classrooms, the variety of intellectual, social, and representational forms would not be possible on such a widespread basis, especially at the high-quality levels observed.

Standardized collectivity refers to standardized practices that establish traditions or create a collective sense. Belongingness and connectedness are nurtured by this kind of standardization. By its “sameness,” a collective or community sense is defined, but specific expressions may vary and differences still exist. Sometimes the collective or group is small or local,

and distinct differences and inequality between subgroups exist. This is true for whole-school identity, where within-school “sameness” is promoted but large between-school differences may exist, especially in status or prestige levels. Sometimes the collective refers to a national sense of “being Japanese.” For example, all schools sponsor a sports day event, and invariably the whole school participates as red versus white teams. The general look and feel of the day is the same throughout Japan, but each school incorporates its own special touches.

Several kinds of standardized collectivity exist in Japanese schools: in grouping patterns, celebrations and events, traditions, rituals, values, and even collective image making. For instance, anyone familiar with Japanese elementary schools will immediately identify the school hat, name badge, backpack, gym uniform, calligraphy kit, and art kit. They serve to build group identity, but they also create tradition. Traditions depend on consistency and continuity over time and place. Holiday celebrations, ceremonies, etiquette, rules, roles, and organizational structures also create such traditions over time. Collective image making refers to surface features that create the sense of sameness when standardized even though underlying diversity and preferences exist in actuality. School uniforms and regulations regarding appearance, public forms of behavior, and established protocol for running events and ceremonies are forms of collective image making.

In part, this image making depends on a common set of values. Thus, standardized collectivity is also represented in an ostensibly agreed-upon set of principles and values even though they are altered in practice. For example, the implicitly understood and publicly unquestioned acceptance of the structural hierarchy and chains of authority enables teachers not to have to repeatedly establish authority and insist on constant control, and it

enables the Ministry of Education to impose regulations, while the day-to-day reality reveals tolerance of individual alterations and latitude for personal interpretation and local adaptation.

Further, in Japan, the image of *homogeneity* is an important source of compliance to standardization. As a nation comparing itself to others, Japanese like to see themselves as mainly middle class and homogeneous, but on an interpersonal level innumerable differentiations exist between people. In private, Japanese moan about income and other status differentials, and they complain and laugh about excessive rules, structures, and obligations in their lives, yet in public they comply and perform their expected share. They discredit the excessive standardization in Japan and the uniformity it promotes, yet they are ever mindful about the differences between themselves and others, and they gossip about these countless differences. Gossip is a strong vehicle for exacting compliance.

Whereas standardized collectivity refers to a cloak of similarity, with elements close enough to define a collective sense whether equal or not, standardized equality places an emphasis on those aspects that are equal when standardized. In Japanese elementary schools, those areas standardized for equality purposes are the provision of materials and supplies; universal participation in learning activities and duties; implementation without exception or manipulation for certain individuals' benefit; and equal membership in the "collective." The latter refers to within-classroom and within-school practices, where by virtue of one's physical presence, one belongs to the group and in turn is responsible for certain obligations, expression of opinions, and participation. To some degree, collective image making, such as detailed regulations that require all students within a school to wear or use the same things, fits into this

category.[31] Equality of participation can contribute to the sense of security, trust, and belongingness.

Standardized equality is most praiseworthy when the standards for everyone are high. Tensions and trade-offs exist between standardized diversity and standardized equality, but more often they apply to areas that do not conflict. For example, everyone in a class may receive the same textbooks (equality), but the ways textbooks are used and content is taught may vary (diversity). Everyone may have to wear the same hat, but individuality is expressed in other ways.

The same three types of standardization may have negative implications as well. Attempting to honor everyone and simultaneously serve the interests of equity, equality, collectivity, and individual rights leads to inevitable collisions of interests. To a certain extent, not accommodating each individual case is necessary to preserve the effective and efficient purposes of standardization that assure equality and collectivity. However, one catch-22 is that in the name of equality individuals cannot be singled out for special instruction. A large class size coupled with a fast-paced curriculum and no instructional aides compounds the problem. Students who cannot keep up without additional help fall behind. Fortunately, most students continue to learn and some catch up. Others can afford to pay for outside-school tutoring or *juku*. But students who have fallen hopelessly behind do exist, and the public school system does not accommodate them. Thus, while high standards and an ethos of equality benefit the majority, not all students receive equal benefits from the same system.

In another example, standardized collectivity may comfort and motivate the majority and may rescue potential outcasts, but for nonconformists who do not fit in, the pain of exclusion may be paralyzing. Severe cases result in bullying (*ijime*), though no such cases were observed in this study.[32] Status

hierarchies exist in every culture and subculture, and in the name of equity those favored and those discriminated against must be constantly monitored. Effectively mitigating status effects depends on the sensitive handling of daily instances of advantage and neglect. Regardless of the culture, admirable educators intuitively and sensitively attend to these instances of exclusion and inclusion, while less admirable counterparts contribute to instances of school alienation, bullying, and violence.

Finally, the same standardization that promotes admirable equality and collectivity may at the same time present oppressive possibilities. The same mechanisms that foster smooth surface relations and promote harmony and cooperation may restrict personal choice, freedom, and efficacy in other ways. The channels for effecting change are limited, and the freedom to speak out (when, where, and how to express oneself) must be controlled. Group consensus and progress are slow, cumbersome means if individual pace dictates otherwise. Being “group oriented” does not erase these frustrations and accommodations, and Japanese can be quite vocal in their critiques of these issues. No simple solution exists. Instead, decisions involve inescapable trade-offs and sacrifices in some desirable areas.

Complex interacting layers of standardization and diversity exist. Undoubtedly, there is a fine line between viable standardization, which fosters high standards and promotes learning for all, and lifeless standardization, which exacts mindless pursuit that inhibits learning or exacerbates status differentials, thereby curbing high standards for the most people. Standardization does not provide answers; rather its value depends on those responsible for its implementation. Success or failure teeter on judgments of the moment—moments that rest with practitioners. Teachers and students ultimately determine what “standardization” looks and feels like as they negotiate their daily lives together.

Looking at standardization as it moves and breathes within the classroom, important nuances come to life. Places where creativity is allowed to roam freely and times when individuality is allowed to burst onto the scene are critical. With common sense and a range of freedom, practitioners effect the delicate balance between individual and group needs, between structure and freedom, and between seeking uniformity for equality sake and diversity for equity sake. Attention to those whose opinion counts, who is heard and who is ignored, who is included and who is excluded, and attention to the complex symphony of feelings and efforts influences the tenor and real qualities of standardization in practice. In this way, there is an art and craft to equity, just as there is an art and craft to teaching. In fact, if a high priority is placed on equity, the art and craft of teaching is one and the same as the art and craft of equity: sensitive attention to the meaningful participation and educational growth of the most students, respectful of their individual diversity.

In healthy standardization, the power of tradition and continuity mingles with instantaneous alterations or more prolonged local adaptation. The degree to which standardized practices are protected even as they are altered, and the ways in which continuity and tradition are respected amidst constant change, may comprise the critical balancing act. The continuity of predetermined intellectual content, skills, and activities yields to the pushing and pulling of teacher and student interests and efforts. A respect for public compliance to the overall structure, hierarchy, rules, and established forms allows room for private disagreement and individual detours. Coupled with equity concerns, advantages must extend to as many as possible. Unhealthy standardization is static and unyielding; it disregards local wisdom and individuality in favor of rule-bound uniformity. It does

not engage; it repels. Willful participation of everyone, for everyone, dissipates. To be sure, both kinds exist in Japan.

A mix of standardization with flexible application at the local level created the educational excellence in the classrooms I observed. Fundamental to its success is delegating a degree of power to control administrative and educational program planning at the local site. And an essential component is the mutual nature of the delegated powers. In other words, the obligations and responsibilities are incurred both ways: a degree of respect for individual practitioners to personalize and adapt their instruction, and, in turn, diligent efforts to honor the intentions of the standardized mandates on the part of the practitioners.

Evaluating the positive and negative implications of standardization depends on the judgment criteria and on the context surrounding each circumstance. Oftentimes, judgments are not clear-cut evaluations of good and bad, and instead involve calculated measures of successive trade-offs. In many cases, the matter is not a simple arbitration of success and failure; rather it is a more difficult dilemma of trade-offs: some will benefit at the same time that others will not.

Importantly, not one observed factor is unique to Japan. Many admirable qualities are the same as those I have observed in the United States. The constellation of factors and emphases may combine to be identifiably Japanese; and the predominance of certain factors across several sites and teachers allows a measure of generalizability. But perhaps the more significant comparisons are not those between countries; they are between successful educational efforts regardless of the country. Admirable and inspirational educational efforts across different countries may share more similarities than more and less admirable efforts within the same country. The secrets to inspirational teaching and learning may have some basic

similarities regardless of the cultural context, and the particular constellation and priority of features just vary due to differing cultural and societal contexts. Could attention to the four Cs and five *Ks*, to interpersonal relations and feelings, and to providing a variety in representational, social, and intellectual forms be the common denominators of successful teaching-learning in schools in any country? This is a pertinent question for future research ventures.

From my American vantage point, standardization is appealing only in certain areas, especially toward greater inclusion and connectedness, whereas some areas will defy standardization. For example, student and teacher personalities contributed to the diversity and refreshing changes in daily school life. When intellectual areas are adapted to teacher and student interests, personalities came alive. Differential implementation produces variance between schools in different regions and between classrooms in the same school. Examining Mr. Seki's and Mr. Ito's classrooms in detail reveal this defiance. In the end, standardization in education does not feel successful without the accompanying qualities observed in this study: happiness, warmth, sense of humor, sensitive and inclusive interpersonal relations, and an ability to collaborate without clear-cut status differentials.

Notes

1. See Tables 3.1 and 3.2 in Chapter 3 and Appendix A.
2. In some schools a designated sixth grader will run to the front bow and say, "*Ohayoo gozaimasu*," with the rest of the students chiming in afterward.
3. A hearty greeting is especially valued for younger children toward adults. The type of proper greetings varies with each situation and not all situations require a greeting, depending on various parameters,

especially the relationship and degree of familiarity. The “established relationship” is not necessarily a personal one; such relations could be client/patron or institutional in nature. A prominent factor is the type of feelings and sincerity expressed: good feelings (*ii kimochi*) promoting harmony are sought.

4. This speech may seem trivial to some readers; however, for me it was a landmark learning experience—one of those instantaneous moments when several heretofore miscellaneous experiences come together to make sense and cause one to say, “Aha!” Previous to this moment, I had noticed that napkins, toilet paper, and paper towels are often not provided, and that Japanese carry their own handkerchiefs and pocket tissues. I had assumed it was a paper-saving measure. And I dimly remembered the time my Japanese-language teacher saw me wiping my hand on my pants and remarked with surprise, “You do not have your handkerchief?” Hearing the vice principal’s speech, I realized that besides the practicality of carrying my own handkerchief and tissues, I was being socially and culturally inept by *not* using a handkerchief to wipe excess sweat off my forehead and to clean my hands. I also realized early in my research that attending elementary school every day would teach me not only about school life but about how to be more culturally acceptable as well.
5. Umi seems to be unusual in this practice, and the issue of flag raising and anthem singing is controversial in Japanese schools. The Japan Teachers’ Union is opposed to such symbols reminiscent of the ultranationalistic system during World War II and honoring the Emperor system, which not all Japanese endorse. During my research stay, the Ministry of Education mandated playing the anthem at school

ceremonies, which created quite a controversy among some teachers and schools.

6. Because Umi's student body is nearly double that of Mori, upper grades may have to march around the playground more for traffic control than for any other reason. In this way, younger students have time to get to their classrooms before the older students are unleashed.
7. This concept comes from Elliot W. Eisner's article, "The Art and Craft of Teaching" (1983).
8. Manabu Sato, Kiyomi Akita, and Naoki Iwakawa (1990) discuss this in their paper.
9. The word *culture* is used in a broad anthropological sense: the patterns and sets of behaviors, ideas, values, and practices shared by a group of people. This study examines culture in its contemporary setting. No links to longstanding cultural traditions and values are intended, although some links undoubtedly exist. The extent to which these values and practices represent longstanding traditions or recent developments is not germane to this analysis. The reader should be cautioned that many of the reported values and practices have taken root since World War II, and others may be recent variations on a traditional theme. Detailing the links with longstanding traditions is a fascinating avenue for future research, but it is beyond the scope of this analysis.
10. Harumi Befu has written several excellent articles detailing gift-giving practices (1966, 1974a) and the highly ritualized and symbolic nature of entertainment in a Japanese-style restaurant (1974b). These articles describe in more accurate detail some of the cultural notions mentioned briefly in this chapter.

11. In all fairness, once the observed class graduated, Mr. Ito's newly acquired fifth-grade class was a reticent, quiet group. Mr. Ito does not discourage loud noise levels due to engagement, only those due to deliberate misbehavior. Noisy classes did not necessarily reflect badly on teachers as long as others had confidence in the teacher's control and the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Mr. Ito had this confidence from the parents, teachers, and administrators in his school.
12. *Toban* roles change daily and rotate to everyone in sequential order (by seating arrangement).
13. This may also reflect the shorter time period spent in his classroom. He felt more constrained to present his standard schedule while a researcher was present.
14. The use of the word *ability* is tricky because its meaning differs in the two cultures. The most notable difference is that in Japan ability is not immutable. In fact, innate ability is virtually a meaningless indicator of performance without taking into account intervening environmental and effort considerations. However, I refer to ability here also to counter the notion that Japanese believe in effort rather than ability in determining outcomes. Explicitly and on the exterior, Japanese may never verbalize belief in differing abilities, but in private and implicitly, the notion is recognized and well understood.
15. Many of these materials must be brought from home. In addition to the luncheon necessities, many materials need covers or little bags for staying organized. Parents make them by hand, or at the very least parents must spend much time organizing and washing the various materials and uniforms needed for school. One of the first lessons in home economics is how to make covers and little bags. Not much

paper or plastic are wasted: milk bottles, dishes, and other utensils are reusable.

16. "*Itadakimasu*" literally means "I humbly receive this." The word is said before eating and when receiving a gift to show gratitude and humble appreciation to the greater powers that be (in the former case) and to the gift giver (in the latter case).
17. Interestingly, Elizabeth Cohen's work emphasizes the importance of these same dimensions in group work in American schools. Her book (1986) provides a superb description and rationale for building group work in classrooms.
18. The words *head honcho* in English come from this term.
19. The observed phenomena may occur earlier, but I only documented fifth- and sixth-grade classrooms.
20. Club activities are the main vehicle for building group identity, a work ethic, discipline, positive attitudes, caring relations, and social cohesion in the beginning of middle school. When I visited some Mori students and their parents 1 month after their middle school experience had begun, I asked how their studies were going. They laughed and said they had not had any homework yet because club activities took up so much time. They had to arrive at school as much as 2 hours early, stay until 6 p.m. or later, and practice 7 days a week. The same emphasis on developing the proper relations and attitudes toward each other and toward learning prior to textbook learning is evident in first-grade classrooms and at the beginning of each year.
21. In his work, one graduate student at the University of Tokyo focuses on the meaning of *body* in teaching and learning in schools.
22. Recall from Chapter 3 that students and teachers stay together as a class for 2 consecutive years in Tokyo, and teachers must change

schools about every 6 years. If a first-, third-, or fifth-grade teacher is rotated out, then that classroom group of students remains the same but is assigned a different teacher the next year. After second and fourth grades, students are completely regrouped with different teachers.

23. The details reported here are from Mori observations because Umi's entrance ceremony occurred at the same time. Specifics probably differ from school to school.
24. School buildings in Japan do not have central heating or air conditioning, so they are very cold in the winter and very warm in the summer in Tokyo.
25. The fifth graders go for just 1 night, sixth graders go for 2 or 3 nights, and the length of the overnights increases, so high school students go for at least a week.
26. *Senpai* and *kohai* are Japanese terms for acknowledging status relations between peers within the same organization, roughly corresponding to age as well. *Senpai* are those who precede and are usually older. They help those who follow and owe them consideration. *Kohai* are those who follow. They learn from their predecessors and owe gratitude toward them. Thus, upper-grade students are *senpai* and lower-grade students are *kohai*. Recall the second graders who played a song to welcome first graders during Mori's entrance ceremony: this marks the beginning of their *senpai-kohai* relationship.

    These are relations that remain for life, and as one progresses through life, one accrues additional *senpai* and *kohai* relations. Some are merely institutional referents irrespective of how much help one has actually given or received; others are truly meaningful and deeply felt bonds and obligations.

27. The four Cs and five *Ks* represent conceptual areas that I derived from the data. They are not an explicitly formulated set of ideas espoused by Japanese educators, though most would agree that these terms are given priority in Japanese elementary schools. The term *caring* represents any feelings (*kimochi*), emotional bonds or expression of emotions, and compassion. I must thank Nel Noddings for drawing my attention to the importance of caring in education, and the reader should read her books (1984, 1992, 2002) for important philosophical discussions. The term here, however, is used in a more general lay sense, and its meaning is derived from the Japanese context, referring to their concern for *kimochi* or feelings.
28. This does not mean that students do not feel great disappointment, anger, or embarrassment if they do not do well. The pain of losing or poor performance is still felt. One clear case in which the outcome is the most important measure of success for a small percentage of students is entrance examination performance. The examination system stands in opposition to many elementary school priorities as will be discussed in the remaining chapters. Several other researchers have documented this emphasis on effort (Cummings, 1980; Holloway, 1988; Lewis, 1995; Peak, 1987, 1996).
29. Recall the use and definition of these terms in Chapter 2. *Ningen* (person) embodies the Japanese conception of the ideal human being, who must have developed the appropriate *kokoro* (heart). Inherent in the definition of self and *ningen* is one's relationship to and dependence on others. *Kokoro* is the center of cognition, emotion, moral, and spiritual self. These conceptions foster attention to whole-person education.

30. These four components stood out in this research venture. Others probably exist and await future study.
31. In Tokyo public elementary schools, students do not have uniforms besides gym uniforms, school hats, backpacks, and name badges. Rules regulating hair and clothing are imposed in private schools and in public middle and high schools. Most regulations limit the range of acceptable choices rather than require everyone to look the same, so "equality" of conditions is not exactly applicable. The exception is the crew cut required for boys in some schools. See footnote 12 in Chapter 3.
32. Bullying and school violence are tricky issues to evaluate and better empirical studies are needed. Newspaper accounts tend toward sensationalism and thus are unreliable. They make such cases appear to be more common than they actually are, yet they are not so rare to be ignored. Minor cases of bullying are more common and were observed in this study (see Chapter 6), but the kinds of teasing and tactics of exclusion defined by the Japanese as "bullying" may be similar to the kinds of treatment U.S. students inflict on each other daily. Regardless of the actual frequency or severity of bullying, the pain experienced is no less real or harmful. See footnote 18 Chapter 5.

5
Two Classrooms, Two Realities

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5.1 Meet the Students

Looking at the classrooms, the similarities outweigh the differences, but a few differences can be detected immediately and often reflect clear-cut class differences in demographics, values, and lifestyles, with Mori being more traditional Japanese and Umi being more atypically wealthy and cosmopolitan. The newer facilities, an electric heater, and linoleum floors give Mr. Seki's room a cleaner, brighter look; the worn wooden floors, kerosene heater, and older equipment give Mr. Ito's room a well-used, plainer look. Classrooms at Umi open out onto narrow balconies on one side and the school hallways on the other. Mori classrooms open only into the hallways without balconies. Mr. Seki's students sit in single-file rows, while Mr. Ito's students sit in rows of paired desks.[1] Due to some alumni or local business contributions, classrooms at Umi got fresh flowers each week that added a nice touch. Mr. Ito's classroom had hamsters and birds. On the walls, more student-made posters of duties and charts of achievement were posted in Mr. Seki's classroom, while Mr. Ito posted poetry and charts written in his own calligraphy along with more student artwork. Student calligraphy posted along the top of a blackboard is a standard wall decoration in most classrooms, including Mr. Seki's and Mr. Ito's.

Thirty-seven students—15 girls and 22 boys—formed a lively, cohesive group in Mr. Ito's class, while Mr. Seki's fifth-grade class was filled with 32 active bodies—14 girls and 18 boys—just as lively but not quite as cohesive. All students were fluent in Japanese, and all but one were native Japanese. The one exception was a Chinese student in Mr. Seki's class who grew up in Japan, so she spoke fluent Japanese. However, the language spoken in each classroom differed enough so that I could understand most Umi students from the first day of class, but by the end of a 10-month daily observation period I could still not decipher some Mori students embroiled in angry exchanges or erupting in silly fun. Why did this occur? Umi students speak in standard Tokyo dialect, whereas Mori students speak different dialects and often use a more informal *shitamachi* slang except in formal situations.

In general, Mori[2] students come from larger families. Seventeen students had two siblings while only three Umi students reported having two or more siblings. Six students in Mr. Seki's class had no siblings compared with just one student in Mr. Ito's class. More Mori students reported living with grandparents: 12 as opposed to 8 in Mr. Seki's class. But the same number (23 students in each class) reported living in nuclear families (mother, father, and siblings only). Only one student reported coming from a single-parent family; this Mori students father had passed away. All other students reported living with both parents, but Mr. Ito reported one student whose parents were divorced, and Mr. Seki confided that four or five students lived with only one parent due to divorce.[3] More Mori students also had pets[4] (dogs, cats, parakeets, hamsters, and goldfish): 16 students as opposed to 9 at Umi.

Mori students tend to live in smaller homes and apartments with more people and pets, so they live in more crowded conditions. Only four

students reported having their own room, and these are small spaces (at most 6 by 9 feet). Or, for example, one observed space is actually a hallway space between the kitchen and living room—enough for a bed, a desk, and a narrow passage to walk through. Most students reported having their own desk, or at least a desk set aside for their studies, while sharing their sleeping quarters with siblings or the whole family. A common setup for Mori students is having one room called the study filled with several desks and a separate room for sleeping. Four students reported not having a particular desk for studies, using open table space instead. One student reported living in just a one-room apartment. I was not allowed to elicit the same home information in writing at Umi,[5] but from student and teacher comments and my own observations, almost all students had their own desks and most had their own rooms. Several lived in large homes, especially by Japanese standards,[6] including one student who reportedly lived in a home with 25 rooms—large even by American standards.

When asked what job they wanted to do when they grew up, most were not sure, but the most common answer from boys was to become professional baseball players, and girls tended to want to be teachers. Many said they want to do what their mothers and fathers do. At Umi, this means interior designer, journalist, lawyer, doctor, or working in the family business; at Mori, it might be some sort of delivery service work, postal service work, taxi driving, or working in the family restaurant or shop. One Mori boy summed up several of the noncommittal answers when he replied, “I don’t know. I guess I just want to be a regular person in a regular job at a regular company.” The most surprising answer to me was from the class “bully” at Mori, a big, strong athlete who instigated the most mischief when teachers were not around. He replied that he wants to be an elementary school teacher.

When students listed nine subjects in order of their preference, most to least favorite, the favorite subject by far was physical education, especially for the Mori boys, with art the next favorite subject, especially for the girls (Table 5.1). Less Umi boys liked art compared with math and social studies. In fact, boys in general liked social studies, and girls (especially at Mori) rated social studies low. More boys than girls preferred science, though a few girls at Umi rated science highly. Besides physical education and art, girls from both schools liked music. Boys from both schools did not like music. Only Umi boys rated math highly, while girls and Mori boys tended not to like math, with a few exceptions in each case. Mori girls liked home economics, while the rest tended not to rate it highly, and it was decidedly the least favorite subject for Umi boys. Calligraphy was rated neutrally and evenly distributed (ranging from favorite to least favorite) among Mori students and was rated unfavorably by Umi boys and girls. Last but not least, Japanese was rated in the least favored range by most students in both schools.

Table 5.1 Subject Matter Ratings by Students

Subject Matter		Favorite							Least Favorite	
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
Art	Mori Boys	2	4	10	3	0	0	1	0	0
	Mori Girls	1	5	3	3	2	1	0	0	0
	Umi Boys	1	2	4	1	1	3	3	2	1
	Umi Girls	2	3	2	3	0	1	0	1	1
Calligraphy	Mori Boys	0	0	1	3	4	1	4	2	6
	Mori Girls	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	0	2
	Umi Boys	2	0	1	1	3	0	3	5	3
	Umi Girls	0	1	0	0	3	1	3	2	4
Home Economics	Mori Boys	0	2	2	1	2	7	3	3	0
	Mori Girls	4	1	6	1	1	1	0	0	1
	Umi Boys	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4	12
	Umi Girls	0	3	0	2	4	1	0	1	3
Japanese	Mori Boys	0	0	2	1	2	6	4	3	2
	Mori Girls	0	1	1	1	3	2	2	3	1
	Umi Boys	0	3	0	2	5	3	3	3	0
	Umi Girls	0	1	2	1	4	2	1	2	0
Mathematics	Mori Boys	1	2	1	2	3	0	1	3	7
	Mori Girls	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	4	5
	Umi Boys	0	5	4	3	2	1	1	0	2
	Umi Girls	1	1	0	0	0	2	5	2	2
Music	Mori Boys	1	1	1	1	2	1	3	6	2

Subject Matter		Favorite							Least Favorite	
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
	Mori Girls	4	1	0	2	3	3	0	0	0
	Umi Boys	0	2	1	4	0	4	5	3	0
	Umi Girls	5	3	1	2	0	0	0	0	2
Physical Education	Mori Boys	12	7	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
	Mori Girls	7	1	2	2	0	0	2	1	0
	Umi Boys	5	4	3	2	1	1	1	0	0
	Umi Girls	4	1	3	3	0	1	0	1	0
Science	Mori Boys	2	2	3	5	3	2	0	3	0
	Mori Girls	0	0	0	5	2	2	3	2	1
	Umi Boys	3	2	3	4	1	3	1	1	0
	Umi Girls	1	1	3	2	1	2	2	2	0
Social Studies	Mori Boys	4	4	1	4	2	2	2	0	2
	Mori Girls	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	4	4
	Umi Boys	5	1	3	1	4	2	1	0	1
	Umi Girls	0	0	2	0	2	2	2	3	2

In open-ended questions about what they liked best and least about school and what they would like to change about their school, an interesting trend surfaced. Not surprisingly, most students (21 at Umi and 24 at Mori) rated recess, free activity time, and playing with friends as their favorite parts of school; however, a potentially significant difference in wording occurred in that 17 Umi students listed recess or free activity time, while 4 listed

“playing with friends”; and Mori’s numbers were reversed: 16 wrote “playing with friends” and 8 listed recess. This is potentially significant when considered in tandem with answers about the worst part of school. Although most students (23) listed a specific subject matter (6 Umi students listed Japanese, 6 Mori students listed math), 8 students at Umi reported bullying, fighting, and being ostracized, while no students at Mori listed these categories (3 students at Mori listed “bad language, name calling”; one of those specified older, upper-grade students). This corroborated observations that detected friendlier relations between students as a group in Mr. Ito’s class compared with distinct cliques and more individualistic, self-centered students along with a few loners in Mr. Seki’s class.

Other areas considered the “worst part of school” included specific activities, such as whole-school assembly (4), cleaning (3), clubs (3), and 2 students each listed tests (Umi), homework (Mori), dirty toilets (Mori), and swimming (Mori). Eleven students said “nothing.” Favorite activities, on the other hand, were physical education (11), lunch (7), art (6), clubs (5), music (2), math (2), and 1 each for student councils, cooking, poetry (Mori), Japanese, social studies, and soccer. All the one- and two-student answers were Umi students, except the poetry answer. Just like their social interaction patterns, more group agreement existed in Mori, whereas Umi had more independent, individual responses.

Sixteen students had no answer to the question about what they would like to change about school. Eleven wanted more recess time (evenly split between Mori and Umi students). Four Umi students mentioned having a school without fighting and bullying, while two students at Mori wanted to eliminate the bad language. The biggest difference is that 10 Umi students wanted better lunches (not listed at Mori) and 9 Mori students wanted a

bigger playground, better school facilities, or more animals (not listed at Umi).

Student answers verify observation notes, reflections, and teacher comments, but such data glance over other meaningful similarities and differences between the two classrooms and their daily operations. Both schools share many common features and some differences are just matters of degree, but significant differences exist throughout Japan, and these two classrooms provide a strong example.

Negotiating entrance into schools was a slow and sensitive process, but once adult approval was secured, gaining acceptance into the students world —their classrooms—turned out to be a foregone conclusion. I was instantly charmed by the welcome, warmth, and willingness to explain everything. Even when I wanted to stay off to the side, like a fly on the wall, a student would inevitably notice and invite me to join.

At Mori, I did a self-introduction, then we had a whole-group discussion period for questions and answers. Mr. Ito asked students to tell me what I should see while I lived in Japan. In Mr. Seki's class, after my self-introduction, students stood up one by one and introduced themselves. Students were polite, shy, and self-conscious; they used standard polite forms to introduce themselves and talked about something they like to do. One boy (Koyama-kun) referred to himself in a very informal way, and the students laughed. He stumbled, looked around as if to say, "What?" and continued. Koyama-kun was readily noticeable in class by his constant chatter and disorganization; he was almost always last to turn in tests and other homework. He often forgot to bring materials and rarely was prepared on time for each period or activity. We will hear more about him later.

At both schools, there were students who could not contain their excitement and curiosity and came up to me as soon as possible, and there

were those who maintained a purposeful distance for most of the observation period. Predictably, there were also students who wanted to approach me but were too shy. They watched from afar until more time had passed. And there were students who were helpful and informative if approached but left me alone otherwise, and those who seemed completely indifferent.

Tall, short, chubby, skinny, aggressive, shy, active, frail, talkative, quiet, serious, funny—these sorts of differences stood out immediately. Beyond these initial categories, personality types were readily discernible: class clowns, bullies, jocks, and bookworms. Some students attracted attention with their loud voices, active bodies, smart-aleck remarks, outspoken views, laughter, or jokes. Others were hardly noticeable with their soft or silent voices, reticent presence, or staying in the flow of activity. But watching their eyes and bodies more closely, I could feel their presence and detect their influence in more subtle ways. The standard of attracting attention revealed nothing of their strengths or weaknesses, achievement levels, or popularity.

The curiosity and kindness of the students toward me in both schools were no different, but social and economic differences were more evident. I took a daily log of the types of clothing students wore. Mr. Seki's students dressed more fashionably: girls wore skirts more often, and boys wore corduroy pants and shorts more than jeans. Reeboks and leather shoes were not uncommon. Mr. Ito's male and female students wore sweat outfits and jeans more often, more girls wore pants, and sneakers were most common.

Social differences came across most clearly in behavior and language use. While Mr. Seki's students spoke more standard Japanese, Mr. Ito's students spoke more slang.[7] Mr. Seki's students used proper forms of speech in appropriate situations. For example, since I am an adult and an

outsider, they sometimes spoke formal language with me. Some students corrected their friends who spoke informally to me. Other students just spoke informally all the time. In Mr. Ito's class, students almost always spoke informally and never corrected their friends' speech. They were aware of their slang (meant for between-peer, informal use), however, and thought it was funny if I repeated the slang that I had heard from their peers.

Mr. Seki's students exhibited proper forms of behavior that went with their formal speech, and as parents and teachers expressed, were more "adult-like" (*otonapoi*) in their decorum compared with Mr. Ito's students, who were more "child-like" (*kodomopoi*) and rough. Mori students were rambunctious and more aggressive with each other. They rarely changed their behavior either when directly interacting with me or when I was merely observing. I always had the sense that Mr. Seki's students had an ever-present awareness of an adult watching, even though they continued their rowdy behavior when they learned that my role was not a parenting or policing one.

More indicative of family economic background are travel experience and *juku* attendance.[8] Mr. Seki's students talked about trips to Hong Kong, the United States, and Canada, while none of Mr. Ito's students mentioned travel except to the countryside to visit relatives. In their responses to a questionnaire regarding summer plans,[9] 14 Umi students reported 1- to 3-week travel plans with their families, while only one Mori student reported an 8-day trip. Fifteen Mori students reported 1- or 2-day trips, especially at an overnight sports camp for boys. None of the 31 responding Mori students planned to attend *juku* during the summer, while 17 of 23 responding Umi students had *juku* plans.

In fact, one extraordinary difference between Umi and Mori students was their *juku* attendance. As fifth graders, all students but one in Mr. Seki's class were enrolled in academic *juku* (97%), whereas no student in Mr. Ito's class attended such *juku* (0%). These classes represent the two extremes of the *juku* attendance scale, but to provide some perspective, according to a 1985 Ministry of Education survey, the national average of *juku* attendance for fifth graders was 21.1%; for sixth graders, 29.6%.[10] Therefore, Mori students are more "typical" given that the majority of students do not attend *juku* and rely on the studies provided in the regular public school curriculum. Four students at Umi had private tutors come to their homes; no one at Mori had such arrangements.

The resultant differences in classroom climates and teaching-learning patterns were significant, especially when coupled with the fact that status distinctions based on *juku* attendance were evident in Mr. Seki's class. Not attending *juku* at all made one student an obvious outcast, and attending review *juku* rather than advanced *juku* identified a few other students as less able and therefore less popular students at Umi. For example, Koyama-kun was showing me his review *juku* book when another boy, Oda-kun, came by and remarked, "Oh, that's not real *juku*. I go to *real juku*. It's more advanced … to prepare for entrance examinations. I'll show you my books tomorrow." Arao-kun was a refreshing counterexample. He was one of the most popular boys, the class leader, with a kind and entertaining personality. He was also the tallest and one of the most athletic students. Rather than attend *juku* as a fifth grader, he had private tutoring in his home.

In general, Mori students were noisier, more playful, more cooperative, and exhibited more equally mutual relations without distinct status differences. They teased each other and picked on each other, but targets

seemed to be determined more by proximity (whomever happened to be nearby) rather than consistently targeting certain students for nasty, disparaging comments or rough treatment. A student could be angry and fighting with a student one moment, then playing and laughing with him or her the next.

In contrast, cliques and more self-centered behaviors were evident at Umi. A social status hierarchy based on differential academic achievement was discernible even in the first day of observation. Teasing by proximity also occurred, but certain students received more assistance and kinder treatment, and some loners were consistently targeted for disparaging remarks, including the ethnic Chinese girl, Wong-san. Ironically, one boy who picked on her the most was himself a difficult, outspoken individual who was picked on by others. Umi students, too, were cooperative and playful, but some students clearly showed preferences for those with whom they wanted to share their cooperation and playfulness. Although Mr. Seki's students were more reserved with adults, among themselves students generally expressed camaraderie, enthusiasm, and integrity. In all fairness, the majority of students were helpful, kind, and relatively quiet, whereas the minority of students, who were status conscious and discriminatory in giving and receiving assistance, picked on certain students more frequently and were louder. On the whole, the classroom environment was amiable and students enjoyed each others' company.

Besides *juku* attendance, a remarkable difference surfaced in how students spent their outside-school time. I became curious about students' use of their "free" time[11] when I observed the activity plans they had to fill out before each vacation period. Students list their daily activities, hour by hour, including wake-up and bedtimes. Teachers must peruse and approve each plan. Each parent must also approve and sign his or her child's plan.

Students' ability to complete these plans reinforced my observations that maintaining a consistent schedule and developing personal habits that encourage productive time use are highly valued means of developing character, self-discipline, and proper lifestyle and study habits. In general, Japanese children and youth participate in more organized activities and have more hobbies than their American counterparts.

I administered a time-use chart:[12] listing every day of the week, 5 a.m. through midnight, broken down into 1-hour time slots with school time blacked out (see Appendix B). I asked students to list their usual activities in each blank time slot. As an American, I would have thought that such a chart would be an impossible task for fifth graders, but seeing their vacation schedule planning charts led me to believe it was not a silly request.

The results were stunning. Students were able to completely and meticulously fill in most hours with their usual activities, and a few Umi students extended the midnight hours because they went to bed later than midnight! Regardless of their admirable attention to detail, the charts are still just an approximation of actual time use. Allowing for the fact that these are elementary students, except for activities with clear-cut beginning and ending times (such as *juku*, other organized activities, dinner or bed times), reported times in general activities (such as television watching, play, and study) are more accurate reflections of relative amounts of time spent in such activities rather than exact hours actually spent. The differences in relative amounts of time spent in these activities reveal dramatic differences between Mori and Umi students.

The majority of students at both schools woke up around 7 a.m. Fourteen Mori students and three Umi students woke earlier. Less Umi students woke earlier because many went to bed much later: at Mori, 5 students went to bed at 9 p.m., 21 at 10 p.m., and 4 at 11 p.m., whereas no Umi students

went to bed as early as 9 p.m., only 1 each at 10 and 10:30 p.m., and 20 students at 11 p.m. or later, including 5 who went to bed between midnight and 1 a.m. and 1 at 2 a.m. The reason so many went to bed late was because of many *juku* and studying hours. On Sunday, their only nonschool day, 7 Mori students slept later than usual, but 7 woke earlier because they had sports practice all day, beginning at 7 a.m. No Umi students were involved in all-day sports activities, so 14 students slept later than usual.

One major difference was the consistency of Mori students' schedules compared with Umi students. All but one of Mr. Ito's students woke up, had dinner, and went to bed the same time each night. The one exception attended *judo* classes 3 nights per week, so he ate dinner and went to bed a bit later those nights (dinner at 9 p.m.). In contrast, only 6 of Mr. Seki's students had such consistent schedules. Sixteen students had an early-dinner and a late-dinner schedule, depending on their *juku* days: 6 students ate at 7 p.m. on non-*juku* days and at 8 p.m. on *juku* days; 10 students ate at 6 to 7 p.m. on non-*juku* days and at 10 p.m. on *juku* days.

Regardless of economic background, many students in Japan regularly participate in educational enrichment activities outside school. Activities include sports, arts, studies, and music, both traditional and nontraditional. Considering the additional fees required and the longer school days and year, participation in these educational activities for poor and rich students alike is impressive. One noteworthy aspect is that despite large socioeconomic class differences, both Mori and Umi students attend many organized educational activities outside school (Table 5.2). A noteworthy difference, however, is that Mr. Ito's students spent much more time in sports, arts, and traditional Japanese activities, while Mr. Seki's students spent more time in *juku* and in less traditional activities (piano, swimming), except for calligraphy. Popular sports and *okeiko* (cultural classes) that

reinforce traditional interests are abacus, art, calligraphy, tea ceremony, music (chorus), and martial arts, such as *karate*, *judo*, *kendo*, and *aikido*.[13] Common sports activities are baseball, swimming lessons, and soccer.

Table 5.2 Outside-School Activities (Formal Lessons)

Activity	Number of Mori Students	Number of Umi Students
Abacus	4	1
Calligraphy	3	4
Tea ceremony	1	0
Piano	3	4
Swimming	4	4
Baseball	3	0
Soccer	2	1
Judo	1	0
Karate	1	0
Aikido	1	0
Ballet	1	1
Chorus	2	0

Again, the most stunning difference is in the number of hours devoted to *juku* and studying as opposed to playing and watching television. Only 3 Mori students attended *juku* as sixth graders: 1 attended for 12 hours per school week;[14] the other 2 for 2 and 4 hours, respectively. The reverse numbers occurred at Umi: only 4 Umi students did not attend some sort of academic *juku*. Of 19 students who attended *juku*, only 3 went to academic *juku* for 4 hours or less per week. Sixteen went to *juku* for 6 or more hours per week, and of these, 11 students went for 12 or more hours, up to 23 hours per week. In addition, 4 Umi students had private tutors (2–6 hours

per week): 1 did not attend *juku* and 3 attended *juku*, 4, 8, and 16 hours per week, respectively. No Mori student had private tutor arrangements.

On Sunday, 11 Umi students (no Mori students) attended *juku*; 10 of these went from 4 to 10 hours, and most reported taking tests during half that time. Several Umi students studied long hours at home instead of attending *juku*: 8 students studied for 3 to 7 hours; 10 studied for 1 to 2 hours. In contrast, only 6 Mori students reported studying on Sunday: 1 for 2 hours and 5 for 1 hour or less.

In addition to *juku*, play, study, television, and computer times were listed. Some students distinguished between "play" (*asobi*), "free" (*jiyu*), and "rest" (*yasumi*) times. In particular, 4 Umi students differentiated "rest" times from "free" or "play" times. Though I never explicitly asked these students about the distinctions they made between these times, the difference seemed to be based on "play" times as those with friends and doing something specific, whereas "free" times were those spent doing nothing in particular, and "rest" times were those between study periods or just after studying.

All Mori students reported watching 6 or more hours of television per school week, while 8 Umi students reported watching no television and 4 watched less than 6 hours per week. Only 6 Umi students reported watching 12 or more hours per week, while 20 Mori students watched 12 or more hours. Conversely, 11 Umi students reported no playtime during the school week, and only one Mori student reported no playtime. Twenty-four Mori students played 8 or more hours per school week, while just 4 Umi students reported 8 or more hours of playtime. Five students in each class reported 4 to 15 hours of free time (some of these reported hours combine "play" and "free" time). No Umi student reported playing computer games during the school week, while 6 Mori students reported 2 to 8 hours per school week.

On Sunday, while most Umi students were studying, Mori students were largely playing with friends, visiting relatives or shopping, watching television, or playing sports: 7 boys played baseball for 8 to 10 hours on Sunday, 2 boys played soccer for 9 hours, and 3 boys played baseball for 4 to 6 hours. Only 2 Umi students reported playing sports: 1 girl had 2 hours of tennis and 1 boy had 3 hours of tennis. Twelve Mori students reported 4 to 9 hours of "play" time compared with 6 Umi students. Four students from each classroom reported playing 3 or less hours. Six Mori students and 2 Umi students reported spending 3 hours visiting relatives or shopping. Ten Mori students watched 4 or more hours of television, while 17 watched 3 or less hours, and 4 reported no television watching; in comparison, 5 Umi students watched 4 or more hours, while 8 watched 3 or less hours, and 10 reported no television watching. No Umi student reported playing computer games, while 3 Mori boys reported 1 to 2 hours of computer game playing.

In line with *juku* and entrance examination orientation, Umi teachers and students placed more stress on academic subjects, while Mori students and teachers applied themselves with about the same degree of diligence in all subjects. In general, Mori students were not as serious or as competent in academic work. At both schools, students were better behaved and more responsive to their homeroom teachers than to the specialist teachers (art, music, and home economics). Specialist teachers did complain about less importance placed on their subject matters by students, evidenced by the less serious student demeanor in their classes.

IQ test scores[15] exhibited a similar range in both schools, though academic performance (rated by *kanji*, homework, and test scores) was clearly higher at Umi. When queried about the purpose of IQ tests and their use, all teachers reported the lack of meaning and utility for such tests. As

an example, one teacher showed how Arao-kun had the highest IQ test score but was an average student (according to class rank, determined by grades and test scores). The best student (in terms of class ranking) had an average IQ score, about the same score as the lowest-ranking student in the class. In these students' cases, class ranking actually paralleled *juku* attendance. In other words, the top-ranked student reported going to many more hours of *juku* than Arao-kun, who reported more hours of tutoring and *juku* than the lowest-ranked student, who did not attend *juku* and had no private tutor.[16]

Some teachers reported never even looking at the scores. When pressed, one teacher finally admitted that on a rare occasion, when a student continually does poorly even with consistent, diligent efforts, a very low IQ score may indicate other problems. But all teachers firmly agreed that high or average IQ scores were not a significant measure of ability or achievement potential. Instead, student effort, motivation, attitudes, study habits, personal habits, and perseverance were more important. Teachers were especially concerned that IQ scores should not affect their attitudes toward students or their expectations for all students' participation and successful performance. Japanese did recognize a difference between students' capabilities that was not always attributable to effort. They did not use *ability* as a term, but they referred to some students who were naturally better or worse at some subject matters or activities. Again, the belief that these natural tendencies are highly impacted by the learning context, personal diligence, and emotional/social environment explains the emphasis placed on these areas as fundamental building blocks to human learning.

The most effective means to promote learning is through creating a positive, fun learning environment founded upon caring, social cohesion. At all schools I observed, students huddled in close groupings—heads,

shoulders, bodies, arms and legs touching—putting their arms around each other, lying on each other, holding hands, or walking arm in arm. They leaned on one another to give or ask for advice, sat together on the same seat, and often freely wrote and drew on each other's projects. The fresh innocence and sense of humor of these fifth graders as they played, teased, and studied in this physical and emotional closeness were heartwarming.

Mr. Ito's class was especially intimate, warm, and helpful, with a comforting feeling of group solidarity and togetherness. His students acted as though no barriers existed between adults and students, or between myself, a foreigner, and their own lives. Mr. Seki's class was not as open, kept a bit more distance and formality between myself and their curiosity, and exhibited more individualistic tendencies. Both classes were generous, enjoyable, and motivated toward learning.

The same inclusion and warmth were extended to special-needs students incorporated into these classes.[17] I was impressed by the natural tendency of certain students to make sure the special-needs students were assisted in all activities and had playmates during recess and break times. Even if many science or art activities could not possibly be done by the students themselves, they were given materials and treated as though they were participating. Fellow students or the teacher would construct the activity for them bit by bit. Most could behaviorally follow along, even though they could not necessarily write, compute, sing, draw, play an instrument, or speak.

Mr. Ito's students sincerely strived to understand the one special-needs girl's speech and played with her as though she knew the rules of the games. She participated with peer guidance in all activities and studies, and she had her roles to play. Once she surprisingly did one of the gymnastics stunts on her own without the teachers assistance, and the whole class burst

into simultaneous applause and gleeful shouts, “She did it! She did it!” Her girlfriends crowded around to give her a pat on the back. When it was her turn to answer, Mr. Ito walked to her desk so that she could whisper in his ear, then he would announce her answer, always correct. He also returned her tests marked in red pen with varied point totals, just like other students received. One girl in Osaka had severe multiple handicaps and was confined to a wheelchair. Her case was no different, as the teacher had her sitting in her *han* with woodblock carving materials in front of her. Her friends had to clean up after her frequently, but between cleaning the drool off her materials, they put a pencil in her hand to draw shapes, and the teacher put the wood-carving tool in her hand to help her carve her woodblock. During their class day, a treasure hunt race in the park, her group participated in the race and wheeled her around the park. Needless to say, they finished last, but it did not seem to bother them, and everyone enjoyed the day.

Importantly, as with many events that involve distinguishing the top-place winners, individual awards are not given. Points may be awarded to a team, but for an individual, just knowing how he or she did is reward enough. If awards are given, everyone receives something for having participated; usually everyone receives the same thing. Participation (effort and process) is acknowledged and rewarded above the end result and achievement level. Individual distinctions are minimized; individual contributions to a group effort are emphasized.

The cooperative, group-centered feeling was surprisingly contagious. Even though I pride myself on my individualistic American character, in the first days of observation I felt conspicuous as an outsider and wondered how I could fit in. I was immediately grateful to the students who automatically noticed my momentary isolation and brought me into their

play, lunch, cleaning, and other groups. Students were wonderful informants, explaining where things were and how to get by.

Naturally, this intimacy breeds conflict at times, and the pressure toward and value placed on inclusion makes exclusion that much more painful. In the rare case of the bullied or isolated student,[18] seeing so much intimacy and knowing he or she is not included must be extremely lonely and painful. Some students (especially the chubby ones or the weak ones) get picked on more than others and feelings get hurt. But when students start to cry or get angry, others intercede almost immediately and divert their attention from whatever upset them, or at least negotiate the conflict. In the students' world of evanescent alliances, tenuous allegiances, and quixotic plans, various groups form as quickly as they disband; agreements and understandings coalesce as quickly as they may fall apart. Concentration wanes. Memories fade. Enemies one day may become friends the next, or even from moment to moment. On the whole, no one is left to suffer alone. Someone usually senses the pain and offers support—sometimes just a hand on the shoulder, sometimes pulling the student into a play group, often yelling at or scolding the aggressor.

An underlying understanding is that whether students like it or not, they are in this together, as a group. An underlying value or hope is that they will learn how to get along well with everyone, or at least be able to have compassion for others even though they know they may never be friends. Accompanying these understandings and hopes is a host of implicitly understood values and ways of operating: for example, pressures not to complain, not to give up, not to be selfish, not to boast, to be sensitive to others' feelings, to tolerate shortcomings, to endure inconvenience, to admit one's own faults, to assume responsibilities, to see others' viewpoints, to help others who are weaker or who need assistance, to honor authority, to

work within the established structure, and most importantly, to do the best one can regardless of whether one wants to do something and whether it is fair. These hopes and understandings are imposed by the adult world and form a controlled framework that sets the boundaries for guiding individual interactions, peer supervision, and control.

Just as importantly, students generally share these desires, at least in principle. The day-to-day, minute-to-minute reality just does not always work out that way. They may not be true friends, but hopefully each person has one trustworthy friend. They maybe outright enemies, but they still can consider others' feelings, work together, and even have fun in the process. Camaraderie, togetherness, and enjoyment do not change the basic fact that in their frank and honest nature, students wear their feelings, moods, likes, and dislikes on their faces, and they can be quite cruel as well as quite tender with one another.

Similarly, classroom management and many teaching-learning processes operate in this fluid, peer-oriented confluence of diverse energies, personalities, and ways of thinking—a seemingly contagious ambience. Keeping one another on track and in line is a constant process; sometimes students ask for assistance and whoever hears them turns to answer; sometimes before a student asks or even thinks of asking, someone has already helped this person. If someone is talking too much or too loudly or tapping a pencil incessantly or being bothersome in any way, surely another student will let that person know. A negligent student is chided by a friend, and a duty cannot be forgotten because inevitably someone reminds those responsible or pulls them over to point it out. With or without words, an equilibrium of activity and control is maintained, a classroom environment is thus created, and teaching and learning occur in a mutually constructed dialectic of ongoing relations.

Perhaps a minute-by-minute description of life in each classroom will reveal some clues to the instructional and classroom management processes at work throughout the day. Excerpts from one day in each classroom are presented as recorded. Appendix E contains two additional days for comparative purposes. These days were selected with classroom instruction, organization, and management issues in mind. I selected similar days (Monday), subject matters (art, math, Japanese, social studies), and comparable dates of the school year (end of January, beginning of February). As I visited from class to class, day after day, the words of my advisor, Harumi Befu, kept coming back to me: "do not look for the 'typical' school, classroom or student, they do not exist." Japanese and Americans alike have a notion of what a "typical" school or student is like in their minds eye, because if one mentions a specific observation, one likely gets the response, "well, that is not really typical."[19] But if each of us searched for that typical school, classroom, and student, they would be difficult to find. In a similar vein, remember that a typical day in a Japanese school is that which is atypical. While Tables 3.1 and 3.2 present the official timetable and subject matter schedule, few days transpired so smoothly. The following detailed accounts are meant to give a sense of daily life, not a "typical" or "representative" day.

5.2 Detailed Accounts from Daily Research Notes

Activities and subjects are described in chronological order as follows:

> Umi, Mr. Seki's classroom, Monday, 1/25/88: whole-school assembly, morning meeting, Japanese, science test, recess, math, social studies, lunch, morals education, cleaning time, clubs.
>
> Mori, Mr. Ito's classroom, Monday, 2/1/88: whole-school assembly, math, science test, recess, art, lunch, cleaning time, social studies.

Appendix E contains 2 additional days:

1. Umi, Friday, 1/29/88: art, math, social studies, calligraphy.
2. Mori, Tuesday, 2/2/88: poetry, physical education, math, singing, student councils.

5.2a Umi, Mr. Seki's Classroom: Monday, January 25, 1988

The day begins with the whole-school assembly (see Chapter 4), and today the principal's speech centers on the importance of keeping good records. He says that students can become pleasant (*kimochi ga ii*), wonderful human beings (*subarashii ningen*) if they precisely take and read notes and carefully keep records. [Adults often remind students to do their work properly, with care and precision, and in tidy, orderly fashion so that it looks nice: most commonly heard words are *kichinto, shikkari, chanto*, and *kiree ni*.] This time the principal uses the term *kichinto*.

Next, this week's goal is announced: "in good weather, lets play outside." Before students are dismissed, the emcee announces three things to think about: (1) let's take care of the places where we play; (2) after we are done, let's clean up and make things look nice (*kiree ni*…); and (3) let's be on time returning to class after breaks.

When I arrive (8:55), I notice seating arrangements have changed by rotation. On the board, as always, Mr. Seki has written a note to the students: "Good morning. Do your lap running properly and carefully (*shikkari*) and do not be late to the morning assembly. Today is Monday, so inspect your lap running card." [Students must keep a record of the number of laps they run each day. Students come to school in regular clothes, must change into their gym uniforms to run laps, then change back into their regular clothes before the whole-school assembly begins at 8 a.m.]

At 9 a.m., Mr. Seki arrives, and at 9:03, Koyama-kun[20] stands and announces, “Let’s do morning greetings,” in formal Japanese (*asa no aisatsu o itashimashoo*). After bowing and saying, “Good morning,” students prepare to play a song on their recorders, and three girls walk to the front. Ogawa-kun says, “Be quiet.” Meanwhile, one of the girls who walked to the front says, “Ready, one, two, okay,” and they start playing. Mr. Seki calls Koyama-kun’s name twice during the song because he is looking around more than playing. (9:08) After the song, Koyama-kun goes to the front to conduct the daily morning meeting. His fellow *toban*, Taji-kun, is absent. He forgets the order of business and has to keep reading the chart posted in front. He ends by turning the floor over to the teacher.

Mr. Seki mentions that Arao-kun and Koizumi-san are not trying hard enough [meaning, they are the elected leaders in charge of disciplining—i.e., keeping friends quiet and on task—and they are not doing enough]. Next (9:11) he has students look at their marathon (lap running) cards. He makes a note of those who have forgotten their cards: Koyama-kun, Taniuchi-kun, and Usui-san. One student admits he has only run 40 laps, while Ogawa-kun boasts that he has done 400.

(9:16) Mr. Seki announces, “Get out your Japanese notebooks. Turn in your *kanji* homework. I wonder if you wrote your names precisely (*chanto*), just as you were supposed to.” Mr. Seki speaks with an even-toned voice, calm and organized, usually in formal Japanese. His warnings and admonishments to students are given in the same even-toned voice, regardless of the number of times he must repeat himself.

(9:18) Mr. Seki writes the topic for the day: “sleep.” And next to that, he writes two words: *synonym* and *antonym*.” He asks what the two words mean, and several students give answers. As they answer, the rest of the students are expected to respond aloud: “I agree,” or “I disagree.” If the

group response is too soft, Mr. Seki calmly states, “I cant hear,” and the group must put more effort into their “I agree.” Mr. Seki repeats the two definitions and asks students to think on their own and write two or three words for each. Meanwhile, he tells those who have not done their homework to turn it in during recess. Several students offer words, then (9:24) Mr. Seki writes a word on the board and asks if it has a good or a bad connotation. Ogawa-kun asks the teacher if the students should write it in their notebooks. Mr. Seki ignores the question, tells students to get out their *kanji* drills, and explains the plans for tomorrow’s test. (9:26) As he reads, Ogawa-kun continues talking out loud, somewhat to himself, “Oh, I can do that,” and all students turn the page, following Mr. Seki’s explanation, except for Koyama-kun, who is fooling around with a plastic bag filled with pencil shavings.

(9:37) Usui-san drops her pencil box and stoops to pick it up. No one helps her. Mr. Seki continues without pause; as he reads, he announces what line he is on. He then explains there is 5 minutes left in the period and walks up and down a few rows to see what students have done. He stands next to Taniuchi-kun and tells him, “That’s right.” Everyone is busy writing except for Koyama-kun.

At 9:43, Mr. Seki announces, “We will have a science test next period; there will not be any library session.” And most of the students groan, “What?” (9:44) Taji-kun [today’s other *toban]* arrives late. Ogawa-kun calls out, “What happened?” No one answers. Most students are working at their desks during this 2-minute break.

(9:45) Mr. Seki hands out the test, a colorful, attractive publisher’s test that comes with the standardized curriculum and is largely fill-in-the-blank, short answers, and multiple choice. (9:47) He calls two boys to talk with them at his desk. Mr. Seki then announces he wants Saturday’s test, and one

of the boys collects it. Ogawa-kun erases the blackboard, and Mr. Seki leaves the room (9:53) while students work on their tests.[21] (9:56) Mr. Seki returns, hands back two more tests, then writes two math problems on the board. (10:00) He tells students to bring their tests to the front if they are done. Ogawa-kun rushes up, then returns to his seat and reads a book. In a steady stream, students continue to go to the front to hand in their tests. Koyama-kun talks with Ogawa-kun and with other students. By 10:06, half the students are done; they then correct past tests or read and chat. They get a bathroom break at 10:09. Most students continue working and/or chatting.

(10:15) Arao-kun tells Shimizu-kun to stand in the back (he has been chatting and moving continuously since 10:04 when he turned in his test). “For 30 minutes,” Arao-kun says, but in 2 minutes Shimizu-kun taps him on the shoulder and asks if he can return. Kawata-kun calls out, “Be quiet.” Shimizu-kun returns to his seat; Mr. Seki says, “There are still people taking their tests, so quiet.” Hirai-kun is sent to the back by Arao-kun. In another minute, he is trying to sit, but Arao-kun catches him and says, “No! Stand!” The rest of the class continues as is: some still working on their tests, others reading, others chatting and doing miscellaneous business and study.

(10:21) Oda-kun is reading a comic book entitled *Japanese History*.[22] He, too, gets out of his seat often and finally Arao-kun yells, “Oda-kun, sit down!” Meanwhile, Hirai-kun is still standing. He tries to move toward his desk again, Arao-kun keeps repeating his name, and both boys laugh. (10:24) Mr. Seki says, “Okay, everyone should have turned in their math by now.” He talks with one girl and Koyama-kun. (10:25) Arao-kun says, “Oda-kun, please stand in the back.” Once in back, Oda-kun bothers Hirai-kun. (10:27) More and more students are finished with their tests, so more pairs of students chatter quietly. Arao-kun tells Oda-kun and Hirai-kun to sit

down. In another minute, Hirai-kun is sent to the back again, this time moving toward the window to stand. Koyama-kun jokingly says, “Oh, how sad.” While standing, Arao-kun says, “Move to the side,” “Go to the window,” “Move back,” and each time Hirai-kun responds with playful moves, both of them chuckling. He gets to sit down a minute later. Mr. Seki says nothing, glances up every now and then, taking it all in, but continues to check tests as they are turned in. Students seem tuned into Mr. Seki’s glances and movements, because their chatter and movement lessens when Mr. Seki looks up.

(10:30) Koizumi-san tells Kato-san to stand in back. Koizumi-san is helping Usui-san and another girl with their work. At 10:31, the bell rings and Mr. Seki says, “Everyone sit down.” He tells them to get out their math notebooks, then they go to recess.

At the break, Shimizu-kun announces that people who are not running laps should do it. Students cluster to gossip and play in small groups of two, three, or four people. Four stay at their desks to continue their work, including Koyama-kun. Arao-kun and the boys he made stand in back all go out to play on the blacktop together, along with Ogawa-kun and two other boys. Two girls play the piano together, and a few students sit at their desks reading or playing by themselves. Three girls wrestle and chase each other; two boys run through the halls playing tag.

I spend recess with Mr. Seki in the teachers’ room. He talks about a certain invisible framework or boundary within which students normally stay. Many like to jump out, and that is okay, because eventually they come back in, but some students … I am not exactly sure, but by this time (fifth observation day) I think I understand his meaning.

As I walk into the room at 10:49, Kato-san, Hirai-kun, Oda-kun, and another girl are standing in the back. Oda-kun is told to sit; he hits Hirai-

kun on the head as he returns. Arao-kun tells Koyama-kun to be quiet. (10:50) Someone calls Arao-kun's name and he goes to stand in back. Meanwhile, Usui-san and Shimizu-kun are sent to the back along with Koyama-kun. All but Usui-san, Kato-san, and Shimizu-kun are told to sit, so when Mr. Seki enters the room at 10:51, they are standing and soon return to their seats. Mr. Seki says, "Koyama-kun, greetings," a reminder to do his duty. He responds, "Third period will now begin. *Rei*." And students bow.

(10:52) Mr. Seki tells Nagai-kun to stand up. Mr. Seki asks him, "What is a proportion?" After he answers, the students say in unison, "We agree." He calls another student, then Usui-san, and asks, "What is the comparative quantity?" She whispers an answer. Mr. Seki replies, "I can't hear." She responds quietly, and he repeats, "I can't hear." After the third time, he encourages her: "It's all right to make a mistake. If you make a mistake, you will remember better." Shimizu-kun raises his hand; his answer is wrong, so he stays standing until the next person answers correctly. [A common but not consistent pattern is that students stand when speaking; if they have given a correct answer, they sit; if they have given an incorrect response, they must remain standing until the next person answers. Often, students answer without standing.

(10:54) Mr. Seki announces that everyone did well on the math test, and several call out, "Oh, it was too easy!" He ignores the comments, and continues, "Let's do today's lesson. Up until now, we have studied straightforward problems. Now you have to figure out the second quantity before figuring out the answer. Open your textbooks." Shimizu-kun runs to the back of the room. Mr. Seki ignores him and points to a word problem written on the board: "Yoshio-kun bought brushes and equipment to paint a picture. The brushes cost 200 yen, and the equipment cost 2.5 times the

brushes." He then tells the students, "Everyone please read this." And most students read the lines together. Under the problem, Mr. Seki writes in a different-color chalk, "How much did he spend for everything?" and asks, "What is the information you know?" A few students yell out the correct answers. [Mr. Seki, like other teachers I have observed, always writes neatly, orderly, cleanly, and with nicely drawn *kanji*. Each line, underline, color choice, and drawing or graph is purposefully, neatly, and carefully placed. Mr. Ito's *kanji* have a more individual, scripted flair, slightly less tidy, but just as organized, careful, and purposeful.]

(10:58) Mr. Seki says, "Those who can do it, write the answer and check your work… Will the answer be greater or less than 200 yen?" Most students respond, "Greater." Mr. Seki looks at a few students" work on their desks, including Koyama-kun s. Koyama-kun goes to the back of the room and loudly blows his nose. Students turn to look at him and giggle. Ogawa-kun makes some comment to him. Meanwhile, Mr. Seki ignores the disturbance and writes a graphic representation of the word problem. He asks three students to explain their answers: Wong-san, Kato-san, and Ogawa-kun. Each gives their equation (200 x 2.5 = 500, 500 + 200 = 700; 200 + 200 x 2.5 = 700; and 200 x 3.5 = 700, respectively), and the rest of the students say, "I agree." When Wong-san gives her equation, Shimizu-kun yells, "I can't hear." She repeats her answer more loudly. All have the right answer, and each used a different method to solve the problem. (11:03) Mr. Seki reviews the different methods and asks if anyone has another way. No one raises their hand, so Mr. Seki asks students to show which way they figured the problem by raising their hands when he points to the equation similar to theirs.

(11:05) Mr. Seki tells students to start writing in their notebooks. The second word problem is also written on the board. Again, he writes the

question clearly in a different color: “How much did he pay?” He walks up and down the aisles, looking at student work and commenting, “Oh, that’s very good, Eto-kun,” or points at another student’s notebook to help guide the student. As he walks, he comments, “There are various methods to find the answer, aren’t there?” He calls on a student to explain her answer. All students say, “I agree.” He then says, “If you figure it out the way Ogawa-kun did in problem one, what would your equation look like?” He calls on one boy to write the answer on the board. Mr. Seki then tells them the textbook and drills assignments. “If you finish early, I am returning your tests. If you have mistakes, correct them.”

(11:12) Mr. Seki asks Koyama-kun, “Have you turned your test in yet?” Soon, students are returning their work to Mr. Seki. Ogawa-kun is the first again, along with Koizumi-san, Oda-kun, and Kato-san. Others continue working and going to the teacher’s desk. Ogawa-kun stamps on his ruler, and Nagai-kun, bothered, says, “What are you doing?”[23] As Mr. Seki grades some of the notebooks, he calls students to his desk to correct their work. Mr. Seki calls Wong-san and tells her she did very well.

(11:20) Mr. Seki asks if people have finished their drills. He has another handout for them. By now, several students are waiting in line to have Mr. Seki correct their work. Koyama-kun comes by me and asks if I can do something with my ears. I have no idea what verb he used, so I say, “No, I don’t understand.” He raises his eyebrows and wiggles his ears by just moving his facial muscles. [I can tell a great friendship has begun…] (11:22) Mr. Seki calls Koyama-kun to his desk and says in his same even-toned but slightly firmer voice, “Quit wasting time, and turn your test in more quickly.”

(11:24) The noise level is rising slightly. Shimizu-kun is out of his seat again. Mr. Seki says, “Those who are around Shimizu-kun … who is the

han-cho?" Shimizu-kun is still jumping around, but the talking stops. Mr. Seki continues, "It is okay to do the handout I just distributed."

(11:25) All are working. (11:26) Students are chatting, consulting, and helping each other in random pairs or small groups. Certain students are asked for help more often from their peers, such as Koizumi-san and Ogawa-kun. Other students tend to help the same people, and clear friendship or consultant pairs are visible because they will get up and go to their friends' desks [Oda-kun walks across to consult Ogawa-kun; Nishi-san and Kiso-san spend every recess together and they consult; Hirayama-kun asks Oda-kun something and gets no response; usually boys help boys and girls help girls]. Kawata-kun turns to his row and yells, "Be quiet," Nishiguchi-kun asks, "Why?" and he replies, "I'm the *han-cho*."

(11:33) Mr. Seki calls Nishiguchi-kun to his desk. Shimizu-kun asks Nishiguchi-kun what the teacher wanted. He replies, "It's bad," and Shimizu-kun squeals, "*Zurui*! (or, that's tricky, crafty, dishonest)!" [I did not hear what he did.] (11:35) Mr. Seki calls, "Take your break now, but do it quietly." [They have actually missed the officially scheduled break time by 5 minutes. Others are returning to class now.]

(11:39) "There is no bell, but fourth period is beginning," then Mr. Seki stands silently in front, waiting, watching. A boy finally taps Koyama-kun, who then yells, "Come to attention! Please be quiet!… attention!" Nishiguchi-kun yells, "Quiet!" Then Koyama-kun and Taji-kun say, "Fourth period will now begin. *Rei*"

(11:41) Mr. Seki begins by distributing a handout and telling students to write their name on it. "It isn't really homework, but…" [A conversational style in Japanese culture and society in general leaves many sentences and phrases verbally unfinished (especially if the meaning is of a negative quality), but the intention and meaning are well understood or should be if

one is sensitively paying attention. Words are not needed and the lack of verbal confrontation or frank, negative expression contributes to surface harmony and protected feelings.] And then he says, “I forgot one reminder this morning. Every year I put together a sentimental booklet with student writings. If you want to do it this year, please ask your parents. Okay, let’s begin social studies.”

(11:43) Mr. Seki writes *mountains* and *plains*. He then asks, “About what percent of the land do these comprise?” Hirai-kun answers. “How is the land divided for use?” Taniuchi-kun has been standing [I later realize students who have forgotten their materials for the lesson automatically must stand to identify themselves], and at 11:44, Mr. Seki waves his hand for Taniuchi-kun to sit. Several other students answer. Mr. Seki sums their answers, “In general, there are three basic uses Turn to page 98.”

(11:47) Students stand one by one to read aloud passages of the textbook. The rest of the students are looking at their books, except for Koyama-kun. If a mistake is made or a student is stuck on a word, others chime in to help. At one place, Mr. Seki says, “Underline the place that was just read. Remember those three words.” (11:50) They are now on pages 100–101, and Mr. Seki says, “Okay, let’s sum up together. Japan is an island country …” And so this lesson continues: students raise their hands to give short answers to Mr. Seki’s questions, then read more passages.

(11:53) Mr. Seki asks the students to get out their memo notebooks. “Don’t forget to bring your map books. If you do not have one, borrow it from an older brother or sister, but don’t forget it.” He admonishes a student for talking, then explains what they will need to know for the test on Thursday. He repeats, “This week Thursday, you have a review test. Write a note to remind yourself.”

(11:57) Mr. Seki passes out a handout: an outline of the map of Japan. Some students notice I do not have one. Koyama-kun gives me his and goes up to get another one. Mr. Seki explains, “With a red pen write … [explains different place names] … remember these precisely (*shikkari*). You will receive another handout exactly like this one. Without looking at this one, you will have to record the answers.”

(12:00) He tells the students to finish filling out the map: “How much can you remember?” Several students call out, “Is this a test?” Mr. Seki says, “This is not a test.” He walks up and down one aisle helping individual students. Nishiguchi-kun asks him a question. He leaves the room momentarily, from 12:02 to 12:04, and returns with a globe and a map. Meanwhile, students continue to fill in their maps, referring to their textbooks. The noise level slowly rises as students talk while working on their maps.

(12:07) Mr. Seki says, “Write it neatly so it looks nice (*kiree ni kaite*) and show it to me.” Ogawa-kun says, “Well, its not pretty, but…” And, Koyama-kun mutters, “It’s better not to show him,” with his usual smile. They continue a little banter, and at 12:11, Mr. Seki admonishes, “Ogawa-kun, are you still talking…” He continues, “You have 10 minutes. Don’t talk. If you talk, you won’t finish on time!”

(12:12) Students begin to bring their work to show Mr. Seki. Ogawa-kun is second this time and bothers another student on his way to Mr. Seki’s desk. At 12:15, Mr. Seki tells those who are finished to read. After they have finished their handout, several go to look at the map and globe brought in by Mr. Seki. At 12:19, he notices Nishiguchi-kun doing something and says, “Nishiguchi-kun, what are you doing? Eto-kun, why aren’t you warning him?”

(12:21) The bell rings and Mr. Seki announces, “Those who are finished, prepare for lunch.” At 12:34, Taji-kun is calling *han* up for lunch, while Koyama-kun is still trying to finish his math test on percentages. Wong-san has scolded Koyama-kun for not having done his lunch preparation, Mr. Seki yells at Taniuchi-kun, and Kato-san laughs at him. At 12:40, everyone is served, and the two *toban* say grace, “*Itadakimasu*,” along with the rest of the students. At 12:44, another student brings Koyama-kun his lunch; he is still looking at his test page, repeating, “I don’t understand, I don’t understand.”

Students expect the lunch meeting to begin, but Koyama-kun is preoccupied, and Ogawa-kun reminds him that it is his duty. He starts the meeting, but no one responds when he asks if there is any business. He asks them to stop eating and to pay attention; his fellow *toban* helps. One student mentions a reminder, then they quickly end the meeting. The noise rises to loud levels as students tease each other and laugh. Arao-kun yells, “Be quiet, please.” Mr. Seki tells the *toban* to end lunch with the proper grace. Taji-kun yells, “Be quiet!” three times. Students continue talking; he laughs, starts, waits, then says the informal form, “*Gochisoosama*.” Ogawa-kun finishes the line for him: “*deshita*.” Students giggle and start to put their dishes away, but Mr. Seki says, “That’s bad.” Another student says the line appropriately, followed by the rest. In an instant, students rush to return their dishes, and the fun begins. I can only hear the loudest voices and those right next to me.

(1:01) The bell rings. Koyama-kun grabs the back of Kato-san’s neck. She screams, and he dances around her, teasing her. Her friend comes to her aid and yells, “Quit it.” Each time they turn around, he moves as though threatening to chase her, and the girls scream again. Several other boys start running in and out of the room, playing tag. Other boys get a ball and run

outside to play. Again, three students sit and read. I accompany Mr. Seki to the teachers' room.

(1:25) We return together. The students are all at their desks, and Koyama-kun starts the class with the standard greeting. Ogawa-kun whispers curtly to Kato-san, "Shut up!" Mr. Seki asks if anyone would like to say something to the class, and no one answers. Then he says he has a letter to read. It is from a former classmate who had moved away earlier in the year; his comparison of his new school to Umi is telling. Mr. Seki reads, "The school building is small, but the playground is big. At this school, we do not have a daily diary or other bothersome details [Mr. Seki's class laughs]. Instead, if we forget things or say bad words, we have to clean the hallway with our cleaning rags and go up and back 30 times. Lunch is very good, twice as good as Umi's! Well, tomorrow's weather forecast… tomorrow's temperature will be 2 degrees colder here than there. I've got to go …" This letter summarizes the important feelings and areas of school life for students.

(1:28) "Today, I want you to think about true friendship," and Mr. Seki points to the topic he has written on the board. "Close your eyes… Until now you have met and separated with several groups of friends, from preschool, kindergarten, and in grade school. Now the sixth graders will be leaving, and soon you will too. When you hear the words *true friend*, what people can you recall?" And after a slight pause, he tells them to open their eyes. He has written two words for intimate or close friend and true friend. He calls on Oda-kun, telling him to stand up. "Without mentioning any names, when you think of this type of friend, what kind of person do you think of?" And Oda-kun replies, "Someone you can talk to about your life or who can understand without even having to talk." Another girl says, "Someone who trusts you." [The ideas of understanding others' feelings, the

power of intuition, and sensing without needing words, along with the value placed on trust, honesty, and integrity, are recurrent themes in these classrooms and in Japanese culture in general. The often-mentioned idea of connecting heart-to-heart (see below) encompasses these themes.] Mr. Seki then asks the class in general, “Do you have such a friend?” Simultaneously, Ogawa-kun shakes his head yes, and Koyama-kun shakes his head no.

(1:33) Mr. Seki hands out a sheet of paper entitled “True Friends.” The first item has four drawings and asks, “In the following pictures, what kind of friends do you think these people are? Let’s talk about it.” The second item asks the students to think of one of their good friends and answer the following questions: “(1) What points do you like about this friend? (2) What do you think this friend thinks about you? (3) Has this friend ever advised, warned, or admonished you? (4) If somebody is hurting or playing badly with this friend, what would you do?” The third item asks students to talk about two compositions written by a boy and a girl explaining what a close friend is to them. The girl’s essay explains that her “best friend is gentle, kind, and a good listener. We play together, share notes and laugh together during class, and one time I took her to the nurse’s room when she was injured. The teacher praised us for getting along well.” The boy’s essay explains that “a true friend is someone who connects with one’s heart and with whom you can have a trusting relationship. One must understand one’s friends’ good and bad points, and even though they are one’s close buddies, if they do something wrong, one must carefully (*kichinto*) warn them. In reality, warning them is very difficult because you think they will dislike you for it. I do not have many friends that close. I am not yet sure I have such a close friend.” Finally, the last item asks students to write a paragraph about the things they should think about in order to make close friends.

(1:34) Mr. Seki asks a few students what they think of the drawings. The first one shows two boys outside a game center [a place with pinball machines, video games], one boy smiling and pointing to it. Nagai-kun says, “They aren’t really close friends.” Ogawa-kun says, “Kids can’t go to the game center, but he wants to get his friend to go, so he isn’t a very good friend.” Taniuchi-kun explains they are playmate friends. (1:37) The next drawing depicts two girls walking arm in arm. Shimizu-kun quips, “Kind of weird friends,” and laughs. Mr. Seki asks him, “What kind of friends do you think?” Shimizu-kun just giggles and says, “I don’t know.” “Normal friends hold hands,” muses Mr. Seki. Nagai-kun raises his hand and says, “They are very good friends because …” Koyama-kun interrupts and says, “literally speaking …” (a phrase Nagai-kun had used earlier), and everyone laughs.

(1:39) The third drawing depicts three girls standing off to the side while a fourth girl is comforting a girl covering her eyes with her hands.

One boy says, “She has been hurt.” A girl says, “She is comforting a girl who has been bullied (*ijimerareta ko*).” At 1:42, Mr. Seki tells a boy to read the next item, then asks the students to write their answers with as much detail as possible using no names. Some students talk to one another as they write, but most are quiet. Mr. Seki walks up and down the aisles.

(1:51) Mr. Seki calls the students’ attention and has a few read their answers. “We don’t have enough time to hear from everyone. Please think about it.” He points to the topic he has written on the board and gives them additional work: “Once you have finished the handout, write a short composition about a close friend or about your troubles with your friends.” At 2:00, Hirai-kun asks what he should do if he’s done. Mr. Seki tells students to show him their work, and several go to the front. Shimizu-kun is sent back to his seat to write more. The bell rings at 2:07. Ogawa-kun asks,

“Is it okay if it is short?” No one responds, and it does not seem to matter. Mr. Seki calls the *toban* to return student diaries.

(2:09) Whole-school cleaning time begins. Mr. Seki’s class is responsible for the two music rooms and their homeroom. I wander to the different areas to observe. When I enter one music room, Shimizu-kun looks up [students are playing] and says, “Nancy’s here. Be serious!” One girl is already cleaning the blackboard diligently. The rest laugh, look at me, and pretend to sweep, but this lasts less than a minute, and soon they are spearing each other with the broom handles, yelling, laughing, and generally having fun.

Clubs begin at 2:43, and I visit the science club first. The only two girls are from Mr. Seki’s class. Fifteen boys (3 from Mr. Seki’s class) are also there. They are designing their own paper airplanes. On the blackboard the teacher has written, “Make a shape, and then make it well balanced.” The teacher remarks, “If your design fails, that’s okay, just think… well then, what design shall I do next?” Since this was my first chance to observe clubs at Umi, I visited several for just a few minutes each. The clay club also had just 2 girls [Wong-san and a fourth grader] and 18 boys. They were building group projects, such as a miniature golf course and a miniature amusement park. The cooking club students (3 boys and 11 girls) were cooking stir-fry. The music club students (4 boys, 20 girls) were playing a band piece. Soccer club was all boys (28); unicycle club had 23 boys and 8 girls. Soccer club played games each week, while unicycle lent itself to individual pacing. [Like their in-class studies, students are actively engaged and having fun, and their conversations weave on- and off-task, but basically they remain on course and accomplish their goals.] Clubs end at 3:22, and students leave the school grounds.

5.2b Mori, Mr. Ito's Classroom: Monday, February I, 1988

The whole-school assembly begins with the principals speech. “Today, everyones eyes are looking at the principal; that is so wonderful!” He praises the students, even though many are not looking. The statement elicits more attention as intended. “Today, I have two things I’d like to say. The first is that spring is coming soon, and that means temperatures change back and forth quickly from warm to cold. The seasons are changing, but don’t wear your spring clothes yet, and take care of your healthy bodies. The second is that I did something I felt badly about (direct translation: I had a bad heart). I warned a friend about something and then left him to fix it by himself [implying he should have helped the friend]. This morning I asked a question to a first grader leaving the gymnasium, and the student replied loudly and clearly, ‘Yes.’ What a splendid response! The student then walked properly (*kichinto*) to the classroom. I also saw a third grader behaving well and I thought to myself, ‘how wonderful.’ My heart improved and I felt extremely happy. Probably, we have such good students in every grade …”

After the principal’s speech, one teacher announces the goal for the week: “Play outside with vigor.” She also announces a change in the play areas this week, letting the third and fourth graders have the soccer area. Lastly, she gives the names of two teachers to whom students should report any problems for the week. Another teacher warns them of the narrow hallway entrance and how dangerous it is if students do not file in carefully to change their shoes. He dismisses the students. Music plays, and they are supposed to march off the playground with their knees high, but many just walk off.

At 9:00 in the classroom, I am freezing because there is no centralized heating, so the temperature inside the building is the same as the outside,

probably between 40 and 50 degrees. No matter how cold, students are not allowed to wear jackets inside the building. Individual classrooms have kerosene heaters, and teachers turn them on at their individual discretion. The noise level is loud, as usual; some students play with the animals (hamsters and birds), while most are chatting and playing together. At 9:01, for some reason the students settle down a bit, though the noise level is still a dull roar.

(9:04) Mr. Ito walks into the room and tells the students to open the windows! [Later, he explains that cold weather makes one sturdy and healthy. Kids these days are too soft because their parents turn the heat on all the time, and they play indoors too much. That's how they catch so many colds.] He asks a question [I cannot hear because of the noise]. Amano-san raises her hand. He then tells the students to stand, and they exchange morning greetings. (9:05) Mr. Ito shows the week's goal to the students and tells one boy to post it in the back. He distributes his handwritten parent newsletter and the school newsletter and begins reading it aloud. (9:07) Several students are talking to one another. Mr. Ito stops reading and waits. The noise level subsides, but it is not quiet, and Mr. Ito says, "Some students are not ready yet." He continues, "Your notebooks, especially social studies and science, are your own to keep, so do them carefully. After you finish completing one notebook, I think it really becomes your own. When you grow up, it will be very important to you. As a record, please use it with care." Then he tells the students to get ready for first period: mathematics.

(9:10) Mr. Ito takes a brief moment and asks students if they can recite the poem without looking. Students do not answer and look around. Students get out their math homework, and one by one, students read their answers, while others check their work. Students go in order by row, and as

they read the answer, other students respond by saying, “Yes (*Ii desu*),” or “What? (*Ehhh*?),” if it is different from their answer. Mr. Ito never asks them to repeat their group response in order to secure a heartier response. “Yes” is a proper response, whereas “What?” is just their natural reaction, not a formal response, but the same message comes across. (9:14) They finish correcting the first section and Mr. Ito asks, “Who got them all correct?” About 10 students raise their hands.

Mr. Ito works out one problem on the board with the class. The lesson involves converting decimals into fractions in order to determine relative value. For example, Mr. Ito writes 0.37 on the board and 8/20. Which is larger? In order to answer the question, students must convert 0.37 into a fraction (37/100) and 8/20 into a fraction with a common denominator, 40/100. He has them recite the conversions as he does them. Going to the next problem, the student says he has not done it, and Mr. Ito says, “It is not difficult.” He works the problem on the board with the student providing the answers. This problem reads 0.25 <? < 0.35. Students are given a fraction, 16/50, and need to explain if it fits or not. This problem requires a little estimation as well. 25/100 is close to 26/100, which equals 13/50, and 35/100 is close to 34/100, which is equal to 17/50, so one can safely say that 16/50 fits into the blank spot accurately.

“Okay, now do the drills,” Mr. Ito says at 9:18. Some students call out some funny questions (I cannot hear through the noise). Mr. Ito laughs and mumbles an answer; “Okay, lets have a little quiet, please.” Students read their answers to the drills. One student mumbles quietly, and Mr. Ito says, “Clearly, clearly.” He looks at the students and says, “Listen carefully.” Mr. Ito does not catch one mistake, other students mention it, and he says, “Oh, sorry.” One learning-disabled girl is in the class. She is unable to speak clearly and cannot write or calculate, but Mr. Ito and the rest of the class go

through the motions of including her in everything. It is now her turn to read her answer, so Mr. Ito goes by her desk, she whispers in his ear, and he says, “Right!” and tells the students her answer. Another student says, “What?” and others laugh. The next student asks, “Are we on number 18?” and reads his answer. The next student says he forgot, but in the same tone as though he answered the question. Mr. Ito smiles and other students laugh. The next student answers.

By 9:27, they are done correcting homework, and Mr. Ito says, “Let’s do the next problems together. On page 78, everyone read together.” Everyone reads, then he asks who knows the answer. More girls raise their hands, and Mr. Ito remarks, “Oh, the girls know… hmm… I’m surprised, no boys?” Then he adds, “It’s Monday. Everyone should sit up straight.” Most adjust their posture, some just momentarily before they slide back into a comfortable slouch or lean on their desks or sit on their feet. He writes the fraction 1/12 on the board and asks what they need to do to change it into a decimal. Kanda-kun answers, “Divide.” Mr. Ito puts up the problem and figures out .08333. The students keep repeating, “three, three, three, three…,” and Mr. Ito says with a smile, “Okay! Now do the rest on your own and recheck your work.” He walks by some and tells them they are wrong. Someone says, “I’m done.”

(9:31) Mr. Ito has them read the next problem aloud in unison, and he writes it on the board: “220 minutes is how many times bigger than 60 minutes?” He asks them to solve it as a group: students yell out which number (220) should be divided by 60 to get 34/6, which can be reduced to 3⅔. (9:32) He asks, “Does anyone not understand?” No one raises their hand. He then asks, 220 minutes is how many hours? Koike-kun begins to answer, “Two hours…,” and Miki-kun, stretching out his arm as far as possible, says, “Oh … oh …wanting to answer. Mr. Ito whispers, “Shh…

you’re annoying.” Another student says, “Three hours …” and Mr. Ito says, “Those who understand, raise your hand.” And they continue to figure out the answer as a group.

(9:35) “Now you understand, don’t you? Good, next, number 7. Ready, go.” Students read the problem together. Mr. Ito then says, “Figure it out in your notebooks.” Miki-kun says, “This is easy.” Aoki-kun drops his pencil case, and Miki-kun helps him pick it up. A constant level of background noise continues throughout the lesson as students confer and control each other softly; I cannot hear their specific words. Mr. Ito whispers, “If you are done, be quiet,” without any effect, then says a little more loudly, “Talking is not allowed.” At 9:38, they read their answers together as the bell rings. Mr. Ito tells them to do page 79 for homework and that they have 5 more minutes until break time.

(9:41) The noise level increases, though most students work. [Throughout the lesson, student murmurs can be heard, mainly checking each other’s answers and seeking help. But students remain in their seats and consult their neighbors (to the side, front, or back, boys and girls).] Sano-kun plays with his eraser. Mr. Ito says, “Tomorrow we’ll have a one-page test.” He talks to some students sitting in the front row: “Were you able to do it?” Break comes at 9:45. Mr. Ito goes to the teachers’ room, and I stay to chat with a few students. Their main topic of conversation is computer games. They keep asking if I have played this or that game, but I have no idea what they are talking about as they try to describe the games to me.

(9:48) Mr. Ito returns and adjusts one desk, moving it back a bit. Students notice, look around, and each row shifts back a bit. Small pieces of tape mark where the front desks are supposed to be aligned, but as students lean forward on their desks, they slowly inch forward throughout the day.

Shifting them back is a common occurrence. He also turns on the heater [finally!]. The heater in the teachers' room is on all day, but classrooms are kept much cooler. The hallways and bathrooms are never heated.

(9:50) Mr. Ito leaves the room and tells the students, "Okay, please study." He returns in 1 minute and says, "We'll do this test within a time limit. Twenty minutes ought to do it. Clear off your desks." (9:53) He distributes a science test. "Okay, 20 minutes. Do as best you can. Okay? All right, begin!" He then adds, "Be sure you read the problems carefully." For the first time today, silence falls in the room. One student sighs; several others join in a long, drawn-out groan as a joke. Mr. Ito says, "This is a test…[implying, please be quiet]. The test content is about sound. A few whispers can be heard, but most are quiet as they work on their tests.

(10:13) Exactly 20 minutes later, Mr. Ito collects the tests and says, "Straighten up your desks." We have 20 minutes. He explains that I have been away from Mori because I was visiting another school. He asks the students if they have any questions for me. Some of their questions are: Was it a male or female teacher? Do they have student councils? Do they get more food, and do they get steak at lunch?

They prepare for art class, which is right after recess, then go to recess. Mr. Satake, the art teacher, is a young, unassuming, quiet man who knows his work and interacts with students kindly and in a straightforward manner. He does not joke with them much nor does he lose his temper; he is patient and even-tempered. (10:58) Mr. Satake tells students to stop talking. One of the students does the proper greeting procedure to begin the period, as they do at Umi but not in Mr. Ito's class. Mr. Satake says, "There are still students not done with their projects …" Then sternly, "Hold your talking … I'm distributing a handout."

He asks Nakano-kun to read it, and the student gets stuck on a word. Miki-kun quips, “That’s a lie!” Several students laugh, including Nakano-kun. After the first part of the handout is read, Mr. Satake tells them to set it aside. (11:04) He shows how a flat piece of cardboard suspended between two objects is not strong enough to support weight. “Its not quiet…” and after a pause, “There are still people talking, aren’t there?” (11:05) The noise lessens as Mr. Satake walks over to Nakano-kun to turn his head to face the front. He then asks, “What can one do to make the cardboard stronger?” Miki-kun answers, then Koike-kun says, “Roll it [into a cylinder shape].” Mr. Satake repeats, “To make this paper stronger, one can roll it and stand it on its edge.” He shows how once rolled, one can place something on the cardboard cylinder and the cylinder supports it. “What can you do to make it stand?” And he folds it as the students suggest. He also shows how one may not be enough, but if they make several and put them together, the result is also stronger. He then shows them a model with several folded pieces forming legs, like table legs.

(11:11) Mr. Satake looks at the students and asks, “Does this make sense? Let’s make the cardboard stronger [to build things]. Okay? I have one rule. Some things can and cannot be made.” He repeats, “I have one rule … when I hand out the cardboard, there will be people who won’t be able to do it… you only get one piece … the rule is that the height has to be taller than 5 centimeters … and you cannot use tape … There are still people who are not listening …” The noise level continues unabated, but Mr. Satake has handed out the cardboard by 11:15. Students immediately start planning their models and talking in groups clustered around their art tables.

The art room is set up with 20 rectangular tables, 4 rows of 5 tables each. Students sit in pairs at each table. The students have assigned seats to begin the day and for some projects, but today some students move to another

table. Two girls turn their chairs around to work on the table behind them with two other girls, so they have formed a foursome. Most students stay in their assigned seats, but students whose partners are absent especially tend to move to another table or turn around to form a threesome with another pair. Although they are not supposed to, some boys freely move about once Mr. Satake finishes his explanation. Their talk weaves on- and off-task, mostly gossiping and teasing one another, until their work draws their attention back. If they notice a friend is doing something wrong, or if they have advice or questions, then they interrupt the gossip to begin task-related talk.

Despite a certain base level of wandering and goofing off, all students are working on so-called individual projects and completing work at their own pace. Students readily consult and help each other so much that it is difficult to call the projects truly individual, yet they each end up with individually unique products. For instance, one student helps another fold cardboard pieces for his bench legs; another asks a friend what shape she likes best for a table; an impromptu group forms to tell another student what he should do; one girl erases an errant line drawn by her friend; two boys help another measure his lines; students toss erasers back and forth, freely borrowing each other's materials and tools.

Break time comes and goes without students taking a real break (11:35–11:40). As always, this group of students seems to have a lot of fun. Their help is as much help as bother sometimes; one boy tries stacking Hino-kun's pieces in a crazy fashion; "What are you doing?" he yells, and Mita-kun pokes him. Kubota-kun, sitting next to Hino-kun, comes to his aid and also yells, "What the …" Mita-kun yells back, "It's a person." They use glue to attach their pieces. Some are making benches; others make tables and beds. Most are making benches just like the examples provided as

models in their textbook. I am surprised to note that at 11:41 all the students are in their seats working, still talking, laughing, singing, joking, and again working, but all sitting.

At 11:56, Mr. Satake tells them to finish their models so that they can proceed to the next project. Mita-kun asks what it is, and the teacher ignores the question. Sakamoto-kun yells, “I did it!” He has placed his pencil case on the small cardboard base that he built, and it holds up the case. Miki-kun also says, “Teacher, I was able to do it!” One boy sees another boy’s work and says, “Oh, that’s quite strong, isn’t it?” Another boy looks over and says, “Yeah, it is.” The teacher looks at another and says, “That’s terrific,” then goes to help a student. Miki-kun is an artist. From the first day of observation, I notice he is always busy making things. Today, on the leftover cardboard, he starts drawing a unicorn. One boy has made a fancy cut-out shape in the back of his bench.

(12:00) Mita-kun walks by Shibuya-san and calls her a pig. She chases after him. Ikeda-kun yells, “What a pain …” Noda-san steps in to defend Shibuya-san. (12:05) Sano-kun accidentally drops a cutter on Uchida-kun’s foot, immediately puts his hands together, and bowing, says, “Oh, sorry… sorry.” Uchida-kun, the class clown, is jumping up and down, acting funny, saying, “Ooh, it hurts, it hurts, do it again!” And they laugh.

(12:22) Mr. Satake says, “Stop talking,” trying to get the students’ attention. He repeats those words three more times, then says, “You cant do it quickly, can you?” A few more students listen. He then shows some of the students’ work, commenting on which kinds of construction make stronger legs. Uchida-kun sees one and says, “I’ll try that.” (12:25) The teacher tells them to put their projects into their *han* envelope. One girl calls the group to attention. They bow to end the period, but eight students keep working, and another seven students are cleaning up. Two girls wait for their friend.

Uchida-kun and Sano-kun yell some chant, then hit each other on the shoulders.

When they get back to the classroom, lunch is being served. I now notice Miki-kun did not make a unicorn; rather he made a five-sectioned dragon. He connected the sections with brads so that he could make it snake back and forth and so that he could stack the sections neatly on one another to tuck it into his pocket. He is showing it to Sano-kun. Sano-kun usually spends his time during class looking out the window, and until today spends more time alone than other students. [No student is left alone for long in this classroom. Even the learning-disabled student has a group of girls who informally take care of her, so she is rarely left out of an activity.] Sano-kun is not athletic, as many boys in this class are; athletic ability and strength tend to determine the pecking order in this class. He is behind grade level in his work: when I glance at his notebook during class, he rarely has written in it. But he tells me he likes school because he likes to play with his friends, and he wants to work harder because the teacher praised him yesterday.

(12:46) At lunch today, only six students do not move their desks. The others pull their desks together to form four groups of seven students each. As usual, except for a few pairs of friends who like to be together often, the groups change each day, and proximity often determines membership. Plus, these groups are not exclusive. Many students chat with others beside, behind, or in front of them. As always, the students eat heartily, and their chatter is quite loud. Mita-kun hits a friend on the head with his shoe.

(1:05) “Okay, that’s it,” and Mr. Ito ends lunch by saying, “*Gochisoosama deshita*.” The students chime in and rush to the back with their dishes. The sooner they turn in dishes, the longer recess they have. Mr. Ito announces, “Those who haven’t turned in their *takeuma*, do it after

school," and he yells some names. Mr. Ito's voice ranges from quiet to loud, soft to rough. He uses informal language like the students. No students sit around and read during recess. Most go outside, though there are usually one to five students who wander in and out or stay inside to play: some play piano, others play with the animals, and others just gossip. Cleaning time begins at 1:25. Those cleaning the classroom do a fairly thorough job, and Mr. Ito helps, while those assigned to the gymnasium and the science room [areas with no adult supervision] mainly play around, just as at Umi. [The other fifth-grade class seems to be quite diligent in their cleaning with or without adult supervision.]

At the bell (1:46), a group of students are drawing an *oni* [demon from folktales] on the board. Like so many other spontaneous activities in this classroom, what is started by one or two individuals turns into a whole- or small-group affair quickly. In this case, one individual began drawing the cartoon, which attracted attention, and others automatically joined to add to the drawing or make suggestions. Miki-kun makes a caricature of Mr. Ito, adds horns, and students laugh. The drawing is all in fun. In later interviews, all students said they like Mr. Ito and think he is a good teacher, though some do mention his quick temper, especially in gym class. As students return to the classroom, they put their arms on a shoulder to begin a conversation, tap a friend's elbow to point out something, or lean over a friend to see what's going on. They also kick, hit, and grab one another to start a playful melee. From the first day of observations at this school, I noted I wish I had a sound-level meter to keep track of the decibel levels throughout class time as well as between classes.

Mr. Ito reads at his desk. On the board, he has written "the history of Arita's pottery."[24] Next to that he has written "Arita—Kyushu, Saga-ken," and in yellow chalk he has written "the native birthplace of Japans

porcelain.” At 1:52, students are still returning and readying themselves for the next period. Mr. Ito does not wait for everyone’s undivided attention or readiness. [Sometimes he does not even wait for late students to return. Latecomers must be brought up-to-date by fellow students.] Mr. Ito begins by asking, “Are there any students who have not read [today’s assignment]?” No one raises a hand. He continues by asking the names of Japan’s main islands. He calls on different people with their hands up. Three students still do not have their notebooks open, while most students are writing in their notebooks, usually copying what the teacher has written on the board. Uchida-kun says, “Be quiet, please.”

(1:54) Mr. Ito says, “Today, this is what we will study,” as he points to the topic, “the history of Arita’s pottery.” Mr. Ito is a storyteller. His voice rises and falls depending on the information he wants to emphasize. Variable tones also help to capture student attention and to maintain student interest. He begins by explaining that “400 years ago, many centers of towns and villages did not even have names. It was the 16th century, the warring states period….” He writes the important information as he speaks. He asks who remembers the famous heroes from this period. Koike-kun and Nakano-kun try [both often are willing to give their own opinions and speak up], but Ikeda-kun gives the correct answer, “Oda Nobunaga.” Mr. Ito continues his story of the period’s history, interspersing his lecture with questions to keep the students involved. He also writes the complicated characters or names mentioned, and students continue taking notes. [Students in both classes often use different-color pens to underline or write titles or summary points. Some include intricate drawings to illustrate, especially if the teacher draws on the board.] Basically, he explains that some famous person went to Korea and brought this pottery style back to Japan.

(2:11) “What do they make here?” Mr. Ito bursts into a louder voice [pointing to the word *Arita]*. As students yell the answer, “Porcelain,” Mr. Ito continues, “And what do they need to make it?” The usual seven or eight people, all boys and one girl, raise their hands. They start listing things they need in order to work. Mr. Ito asks, “Remember Mashiko?” [This is a pottery village near Tokyo that students visited on their social studies field trip in November. I was fortunate to attend along with a few parents who became good informants throughout this study.]

Another girl raises her hand to explain about the kind of kiln that is built on an ascending hill [as in Mashiko]. Mr. Ito writes answers as they are given. As students raise their hands, he acknowledges them by saying, “Okay, please go ahead (*Hai*, *doozo*).” One boy answers, “Fuel,” and Mr. Ito comments, “Ahh, that’s important, isn’t it?” After a slight pause, he adds, “Is that enough?” All the while his eyes are scanning the faces of his students. Sakamoto-kun adds, “A warehouse to store things in.”

(2:15) Another student answers, but I cannot hear because the noise level of students chatting and consulting has risen again. Mr. Ito continues, “Oh, in order to deliver it, what kind of transport…?” Students keep saying answers out loud or raising their hands. “Horse,” someone yells; Mita-kun says, “Roads that are built properly (*kichinto*).” Another student says, “Houses, motels, and stores.” Some students ask questions; fellow students answer. Hamada-san says, “They had souvenir (*omiyage*) sellers!” “And restaurants!” pipes Miki-kun. Mr. Ito ignores the silly answers and writes the name of the harbor that goods were shipped to and from. One boy drops his pencil case. Mr. Ito glances. The boy picks it up quickly.

(2:19) In yellow chalk, Mr. Ito continues to write: “special characteristics of Arita pottery.” He writes a complicated *kanji* and asks students who can read it. Muraki-san calls out and is right. He adds, “This kind of pottery is

refined and fancy, like the school Nancy just visited. Mashiko pottery is more like our kind of pottery [meaning more down-to-earth, plain, regular ceramics].” And he and the students laugh.[25]

(2:30) Their study and conversation continues, following the journey Arita ceramics has traveled since its origins. Mr. Ito writes the main points as he speaks. (2:34) “You all understand, right? Look at page 85 again.” Photos of Arita ware appear on the page. They have a conversation about how much it costs.

(2:37) “Okay, we’ll stop here. Get ready for home.” Mr. Ito ends the class. At 2:42 he makes the students recite the poem in unison without looking at it. Most students do it without trouble. “Tomorrow we will do jump rope.” Many students look surprised. (2:46) The *toban* say, “Attention!” Most students are not paying attention. Mr. Ito says, “Bad… sit down.” He explains, “If you do things hurriedly, they turn out badly.” He tells a story, then explains that they are Japanese. He talks about “*shinjinrui*,” a term describing a new generation of Japanese, and explains how values and principles change with time, but basic principles stay the same. He talks to them about sincerity and honesty, and that if they can define their principles and live by them honestly, they will become splendid people.

(2:50) “That’s the end,” he says heartily. Again, the students are not paying much attention to the final greetings. Mr. Ito repeats, “Bad …” and tells them to sit, not talk. The *toban* try again, “Stand up,” and then bow with the students following suit, and all say, “Good-bye!”

5.3 Meet the Teachers

The previous classroom snapshots just partially reveal the nature of relations, teaching-learning processes, classroom organization, and teacher and student personalities at work. Amidst the overall similarities, significant

differences exist. Imagine the difference being in a class where most of the students have already studied the subject matter before the teacher introduces it, as opposed to being in a class where all students have not studied the material until the teacher presents it. The simple phrase, “I do not go to *juku*,” contains completely different meaning for a student in Mr. Seki’s class as opposed to Mr. Ito’s class. What differential impact has occurred for students who have not experienced the power and sense of community through song compared with those who have? And what differential impact on test scores occurs for students who have daily test-taking practice compared with those who do not?

Mr. Seki’s students ran daily class meetings, formally opened and closed each class period with set phrases, and stood when they had forgotten something or answered incorrectly. Mr. Ito’s students only occasionally had the opportunity to assume leadership roles and to run class meetings; they were rarely singled out for wrong answers or for forgetfulness. Mr. Seki used the educational television programming for social studies and moral education and otherwise supplemented the textbook curriculum with extra handouts and drill sheets. Mr. Ito never used the television and supplemented the textbook curriculum with more diversified activities and forms of learning. Mr. Ito distributed detailed newsletters to parents three times a week, while Mr. Seki exchanged diary entries with his students every other day. Umi teachers exact proper decorum from students more often. Mori students have more community-oriented activities.

Teaching styles vary with each teacher. One teacher runs class like a drill sergeant, another like a mother hen. One teacher instills a sense of unity such that students do everything together and similarly, while the teacher next door prefers a more relaxed atmosphere that allows individual student preferences and characters to dictate classroom life. One teacher posts

charts to publicize performance levels; another teacher does not. One teacher pays strict attention to every proper detail; another overlooks details in favor of a natural flow of life.

Thus, despite outsiders' characterizations of homogeneity, standardization, and uniformity, students have obvious preferences for which teachers and classroom operations they like best and least. On one student survey, students could clearly articulate their criteria for the kinds of teachers they prefer: young, good sense of humor, someone who plays with students, someone who makes studies interesting and easy to understand, and someone who does not pay meticulous attention to many details. And student preferences differ: one student likes an intimate, structured environment, whereas another would prefer more freedom and less interdependence; one loves music and group activities, whereas another hates to work in groups and cannot stand to sing; one easily keeps track of every detail, whereas another can never manage to get everything in the right place at the right time.

A brief description of Mr. Seki and Mr. Ito and their classrooms does not do justice to the breadth and depth of reality they produced together each day, but it helps to provide clues to the complexity of school life and educational practices. Mr. Ito has his quiet and his volatile moments; he is open, down-to-earth, practical, thoughtful, and organized, in his own fashion. His temper and his excitement are revealed in the varied tones and tempo of his speech. He has an individual flair, best reflected in his hairstyle, which he cuts short and then lets grow long because he hates going to the barber. He spends less time at school but is engaged in many educational and professional development activities off campus, such as facilitating a teacher research group, discussing science education on an

educational radio program, and publishing articles in books and professional journals.

Mr. Seki is quiet, guarded, considerate, thoughtful, straightforward, and careful. He spends more time at school (arriving early and staying late) but does less outside professional development activities. He attends seminars but does not actively participate in research groups or publish articles. If he has a temper, it rarely shows, as his teaching and reprimands are delivered in the same systematic, clear, explanatory style. In his dress and appearance, he shows the same consistent, neat manner. I did not ask him about going to the barber, but he goes often enough that his hair always seems to be the same length.

Mr. Ito's overall style is that of a storyteller. He loves to read. He is originally from the countryside, and he maintains his older, traditional values of simplicity, natural beauty, reflection, and developing caring, thoughtful human beings as an overall educational goal. In jovial fun, a fellow teacher refers to Mr. Ito as a "country boy," and in turn, Mr. Ito refers to his friend as a "city boy." Mr. Seki is more of a technocrat; he is organized, proper, and systematic in his approach to life and teaching. He is from the city and has more contemporary values, but they include developing caring human beings. He tells less stories of cultural traditions or stories with moral endings than Mr. Ito does. I do not know how much he reads, but he does enjoy socializing with his fellow teachers after work.

In a sense, the teaching styles fit the students' styles and cultural backgrounds. Mr. Ito is more informal, lively, and has his rough moments. Mr. Seki is consistently polite, more formal, careful, and attentive to details. Whether a reflection of the school population or his own teaching philosophy, Mr. Seki stressed academics and gave tests and quizzes almost daily, usually using the standardized tests provided by publishing

companies. Mr. Ito expressed his distaste for tests because they do not show what the students really learn. He used standardized tests, but more often devised his own, and at most, he gave tests once a week (only once in the whole month of November). Many tests were used as study devices rather than as assessment tools. He gave more tests just before report card time at the end of each trimester to determine grades. Mr. Ito recorded test scores only of those tests that he announced were for grading purposes. Mr. Seki's grade book had many more test scores listed. Even though Mr. Ito had more flexibility to change content and subject matter order, both teachers covered the textbook material in the end.

Mr. Seki had a more public evaluation structure—that is, more ways to tell who was doing better or worse than another. For example, *kanji* test rankings were posted in a chart that mimicked *sumo* rankings.[26] Sometimes he announced who received perfect scores on tests as he returned them. Once he returned tests in order, worst to best scores. In contrast, Mr. Ito had no public forms of evaluation, except his temper when he yelled at students for not trying. As far as I could tell, except for a couple students in math, his temper was not consistently directed at the same students but rather at the culprits of the moment, which did not follow class ranking. His temper quickly rose when a student did not appear to be trying hard enough or did not know an answer to something the class had already studied. He also cared as much about excellent physical education performance and musical performance as he did about other subject matter mastery.

Mr. Ito stressed more music, art, physical education, and poetry along with the academic subjects in order to develop students' hearts and bodies as much as their minds. Mr. Seki's instructional periods consisted of more straightforward reading aloud, lecture, note taking, and teacher-centered question-answer discussions, while Mr. Ito incorporated more varied modes

in his instruction: drawing, body movement, music, recitation, reflection, lecture, teacher-centered discussions, and note taking. Mr. Seki seemed to place even emphasis on each topic, whereas Mr. Ito spent more time on some topics, glancing over others, depending on his interests and students' needs.

Both teachers incorporated a mixture of individual seat work, small-group work, and whole-group instruction. And significantly, the divisions between these individual and group modes are not clearly distinguishable due to classroom norms that promote almost constant consultation or assistance regardless of the supposed activity structure, whether whole-group lecture or individual seat work.

Although more Mori students were behind grade level in *kanji* and math, Mr. Ito did not provide extra remedial work. He explained that in order to understand current work, students often had to review or work on perfecting past studies, so they might eventually catch up by persevering. Neither teacher seemed to provide significantly more help to students who performed less well. Frankly, the school day does not allow much free time for this to happen: recess and break time are needed for everyone, and before- and after-school times are heavily programmed. Both teachers helped those who did not understand as they walked up and down aisles during the few minutes of individual seat work. Otherwise, students who did not understand were either helped by friends, left to their own devices, or parents had to supply the missing link, either personally or through enrollment in outside educational activities.

In the same free-form style, Mr. Ito seemed to leave disciplining to the students without a clear-cut structure (although he clearly had his standards, and students knew his expectations). His style succeeded on an informal basis, rarely needing intervention except during occasional weekly class

meeting discussions. Mr. Ito began such class meetings by explaining a problem he felt existed in the class, then turning the meeting over to the students. On their own initiative, students had to clarify their involvement. One meeting ended in tears for both the victims (of a bullying incident) and the aggressors (the two biggest, strongest boys in the class). Mr. Seki had explicitly established channels and responsibilities for peer supervision and disciplining (*han-cho* and the two student leaders, Koizumi-san and Arao-kun) as well as the informal modes. As a result, the flow of activity was more often punctuated by students yelling, “Be quiet!”

Even though Mr. Seki used more public, explicit means to record reminders, to identify wayward students, and to organize students (*han-cho*, standing as public recognition for forgotten things or errant behavior, memo notebook, class meetings, standard procedures), both classes seemed to remember equally as well, and everything ran smoothly in both classrooms. Students yelling, “Be quiet,” over and over did not produce quiet in any quicker time period. So many ways of reminding students about the next days activities did not seem to increase their ability to remember.

Interestingly, both teachers have culturally based philosophies to explain their two different approaches to standardized practices, such as preestablished ways to begin and end each class period. Mr. Ito draws on the Zen philosophy of simplicity and natural beauty, including slight imperfections, in his sense of aesthetics. Thus, he likes classes to begin and end without imposing a ritualized procedure. He wants children’s behaviors and expressions to be more natural rather than stiffly following a preset standard, except at certain times. For some formal occasions or special events, the symmetry of all students acting in unison is prettier, and he emphasizes uniformity on these occasions. Mr. Seki draws more on the cultural values of precision, attention to details, and symmetry as aesthetic

forms to justify following preset ways of beginning and ending classes. Conformity to and respect for certain cultural behaviors and procedural patterns are necessary to develop self-discipline and character and for reinforcing proper forms of behavior important to children's future roles as adults in society.

Although Mr. Seki and Mr. Ito have very different personalities and work styles, their success as "good" teachers shares some common elements. Both are dedicated professionals genuinely concerned about the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive well-being of all their students. They manage to motivate and engage students with diverse achievement levels and educational aspirations. Low- and high-achieving students are not differentially treated in consistent ways. Both exhibit a sensitivity in dealing with these diverse student personalities, competencies, behaviors, and attitudes. A relaxed approach, combining patience, tolerance, mutual respect, flexibility, and a sense of humor, contributes to a classroom atmosphere of pleasure and togetherness for most participants. Along with high standards and clear expectations of conformity to some group considerations, individual expression is welcomed as students progress together. Careful attention to the quality of relations between the teachers and their students creates a sense of community.

However carefully and sensitively a teacher tries to create a community, daily interactions still involve varying degrees of acceptance and inclusion for each individual student. Innumerable elements in the community, school, and classroom environments, as well as personalities, family, and cultural backgrounds, may influence differential treatment. Status differentials differ depending on each individual case. Even if the overall class climate is cooperative, the learning experience can be dramatically

different for an individual student who is excluded from the cooperative sentiments. The following summary discusses a few areas of concern.

5.4 Summary of Classroom Observations

Different aspects of the previous excerpts probably stand out for each reader, but I was most impressed by four main areas: (1) the students and the nature of their involvement in school; (2) classroom organization and management processes; (3) the classroom climate; and (4) instruction patterns. Instruction patterns are examined in Chapter 6, guided by an analysis of the three forms of the conceptual framework.

In their curiosity, generosity, warmth, and honesty, Japanese fifth-sixth graders are like most students their age, regardless of the country. They seem more innocent and intimate than their American counterparts, but like all children, they want to please, to help, to laugh, and to be accepted. Active bodies, unpredictable minds, comical comments, and a marked preference for goofing off rather than for sitting in silent concentration identify basic elementary school student traits, including those observed in this study. A range of colorful personalities contributes to the overall positive, enjoyable tenor of classroom life.

One of the most outstanding impressions of this observational study was the happiness, emotional warmth, and sensitivity to feelings exhibited by students in their daily school life. Students were truly having fun at school. Absentee rates in both classrooms were extremely low. Enough enjoyable activities and events were interspersed with less enjoyable subject matters so that students were able to concentrate and work hard in most activities whether they liked them or not. Besides the engaging quality of enjoyment, the nature of student involvement was remarkable, particularly in the high levels of engagement made possible for all students. Engagement refers to a range of qualities: the degree of student effort, initiative, motivation,

diligence, sense of responsibility, attention to details, and sensitivity to materials and other people in their environment.

The overall classroom climate was one of active, noisy, engaged bodies and minds. Students and teachers had fun and worked hard, sharing both exciting, boring, difficult, easy, rewarding, and disappointing moments. The daily activities were varied and structured, yet within the structure a degree of freedom and individuality was evident. A strong sense of community and a finely tuned sense of intuition were notable features of the classroom climate that played a valuable role in maintaining smooth classroom operations. Students and teachers seemed to have a sixth sense in noticing what needed to be done and acting upon that intuition without having to be told: ideally, they "watch without appearing to observe" and "get the answer without having to ask a question" (Singleton, 1989; see Section 6.5b in Chapter 6).

Despite vastly different career ambitions, future educational plans, economic resources, study/play hours, and study habits, most students in this study seemed motivated and interested in learning. All students wanted to have friends, have fun, do well, and be recognized for their accomplishments. Their motivation, dedication, and enthusiasm were contagious for individuals and for the group as a whole. The extracurricular activities, events, and diversified learning modes seemed to contribute most to this engagement.

Students seem to have limitless energies and capabilities to put forth diligent efforts in their play, mischief, and studies, and they can switch quickly from one to the other. Children seem to have an uncanny ability for carrying on several conversations at once, doing something else with their hands, bodies, and feet, all the while listening to the teacher. Or, in the observed cases, if they miss out on something, a friend will bring them back

on target. Although I have not visited schools in many other countries, I suspect that the observed students are similar in their cheers for homework not assigned and in their groans for tests that are assigned. As a group, they test the teachers' tolerance for noise and smart-aleck remarks, and they negotiate to postpone due dates and change assignments.

The observed Japanese students also displayed noteworthy initiative, responsibility, and leadership, even in the midst of their noise making and mischief. When students finished sooner than their peers, they automatically kept themselves busy with some other homework or business, drawing, reading, or helping friends. Their abilities to run meetings and events and to dependably carry out administrative tasks were carefully developed as part of their responsibilities as members of the school community. In large part, students managed to keep themselves productively engaged whether or not adults were around because of the quality of relations established between students and adults in schools.

As a top priority, teachers seek to maximize involvement. From a classroom group composed of diverse, competing personalities and competency levels, they seek to create a cohesive community of interdependent teachers and learners. They seek to nurture a sense of community not only of physical togetherness but of emotional and mental communion: a unity of hearts as well as bodies and minds. This comforting community environment contributed to the observed engagement and enjoyment, which in turn further bolstered the desired relations. Usually the social cohesion was so strong that students moved together without coercion. They intuited the next step without constant intervention. And they initiated work without continual threats of punishment.

Two prominent classroom management strategies were a noticeable lack of punishment and yelling on the part of adults even when plentiful

instances warranted such reactions and the small amount of teacher time spent in actual disciplining and explaining classroom procedures. In part, these strategies reflect partial delegation of these duties to students. The community is one of the teacher together with the students, not a domineering figure from above or an enemy pitted against the students. Responsibility for self and others is shared by all. In part, the strategies also reflect the need to maintain smooth class operations and an instructional rhythm, both to be able to cover all the required material and to maintain student interest. Importantly, less time spent in disciplining and in explaining procedures does not necessarily reflect more obedient or quiet students but rather teachers demonstrate a markedly higher tolerance of background noise and student infractions of rules and commands. From a practical viewpoint, teachers might never teach if they tried to exact perfect attentive behavior and silence from students, because that process would take too long. And if they scolded each off-task behavior and utterance, class instruction might be so tedious and filled with interruptions that no one would be able to teach or learn.

These strategies basically reflect different notions of authority and control, childhood, and noise. Authority comes from the established structure and traditions; control comes from mutually constructed respect and trusting relations. The interplay of the two is important. Authority bestowed by the hierarchical structure is also secured by judiciously delegating precisely construed kinds and degrees of authority to students to ensure control. Both are not threatened by minor infractions and breakdowns, as long as overall progress is maintained and underlying respect is understood; both are threatened by an absence of community spirit and the absence of reliable, caring social relations. The result is a carefully crafted set of meaningful relations between students and teachers,

as individuals and as a group, nested in a relatively systematic, consistent, and predictable set of organizational structures and procedures, and ideally tempered by the human touch: guided by *kokoro* (heart), a generous set of values emphasizing compassion and fairness.

An underlying philosophy allowing for a broad range of noise and mischief without imposing adult sanctions is the belief that children are inherently good by nature and inherently mischievous and noisy when engaged and healthy. The perpetrators are less likely to be seen as "bad," "undisciplined," or "disrespectful" children and more likely to be seen as having good hearts while such behaviors are just manifestations of a healthy but immature release of childhood energy. The misbehaviors were less attributed to intentionally bad behavior and instead were attributed to a lack of understanding or a lack of developing the proper trusting relationship with adults and peers, the latter being the primary responsibility of the adults to correct, not the children alone. Lack of understanding changes with maturation, and maturation occurs through time, not through punishment.

One Japanese professor observed that Americans tend to treat child rearing like animal training—that is, every time children do something undesirable, they are punished to secure the proper behavior and understanding. Instead, the Japanese approach to child rearing is more like raising plants. The goal is to provide the right nutrients and guidance. In its own time, each plant will grow straight, strong, and sturdy. The path may be filled with daily misbehavior and mischief, but every instance need not be punished or controlled. Understanding will evolve eventually. Guidance is best provided through positive adult role modeling and well-placed praise rather than through negative reprimands or inconsistent adult behavior. Its success depends on alert, compliant student attention; thus adults must be

patient and persistent because students will inevitably stray. Waiting for students to notice and to bring themselves back in line takes time and patience.

Several instructional priorities also inescapably lead to higher noise and activity levels. One is the primary value placed on interpersonal relations and social cohesion. Togetherness begets noise. Second, interdependence presupposes noise. Peer supervision, teaching-learning, and shared class management duties necessitate elementary student-style communication. Due to permissible levels of peer communication, students are able to effect smooth transitions between activities. Third, attention to the emotional, social environment is fundamental in order to cultivate a productive learning environment. An inevitable amount of disruption accompanies growth when students are emotionally and socially involved. Finally, basic to all this logic is instilling the proper attitudes and approach to learning. The most fundamental concerns are to captivate children's interests, spark their imaginations, generate enthusiasm, and inspire motivation. One teacher nicely described this enthusiasm when he explained that the most rewarding aspect of teaching is when students cry out, "I did it!" (*Yattal*) Once students care about doing well and about each other, then learning naturally happens and so does noise and mischief.

Although not always desired, teachers view some noise and mischief as tolerable because motivation is most important for studies and group cohesion. Noise as togetherness, noise as sharing authority and control, and noise as exhibiting the proper attitude toward learning are acceptable boundaries. Since I never observed a teacher who demanded complete quiet and proper attention in classrooms or during recesses, I cannot draw a firm conclusion, but leniency (some Americans would label the noise "intolerable" and the behavior "wild") seemed to be critical in securing

more attentive demeanor during classroom instruction. Because teachers required absolute quiet and attention so few times, they usually obtained it when they really needed or wanted it.

The students' power of concentration was noticeably high, even as noise levels ranged from silent to thunderous. The noise levels tended to rise both with excitement and with boredom—for example, toward the end of a long explanation before a hands-on activity or when work was finished early. Teachers did not worry about the noise of excitement or engagement even though it was disruptive at times. Instead, they reported that students who were too quiet were worrisome. In general, in comparison with Mori students, Umi students were quieter during class instruction and other meeting times and less thunderous during break time. The quietest times were when students were taking tests and instantaneous moments when the teacher said or did something unexpectedly. A hush would fall across the room, then loud laughter or murmuring would follow when they figured out what was happening. Regarding equity concerns, the amount and timing of noise and silence are not as important as the determination of who is included and excluded in these times of noise and silence.

The three most disturbing aspects of the observed classroom life were (1) lack of a mechanism for providing more help to those who were not able to keep up with the standardized curriculum; (2) the increased existence of cliques and social isolates at Umi; and (3) the impact of academic *juku* on the elementary school curriculum and on classroom life, as well as on the participants and on family life. *Juku* impacts both those who are able to attend (study pressures, loss of playtime, social status and social skills effects) and those who are unable to attend (second-class status, limited future opportunities, inability to keep up with peers). On the positive side, for those who attend *juku*, their studies improve, they have other

opportunities to socialize and make new friends, and they keep busy. At least, *juku* is more engaging and constructive than watching television alone and more social than studying the same number of hours with ones mother. For those who do not attend, the possible positive side effects are additional free time and opportunities to play with neighborhood friends and to participate in nonacademic or more active enrichment activities. This study did not adequately survey outside-school activities, especially the nature of student involvement in *juku*, so the following discussion discloses observations and possible trends rather than generalizable truths.

From a teacher point of view, *juku* helps reduce the teaching load in one sense, since some students understand the lesson before teachers have even taught it, but it undermines the teacher's role in another sense, because students who already know the content are less inclined to listen. Teachers have to negotiate between students who have already mastered the material and those who have not yet been introduced to it. The problem is more than a cognitive one; the emotional and social implications present troublesome issues. The teacher's task is easier because there are more "experts" who can help others. But their task is also more difficult because they must prepare for vastly differing achievement levels, and they may have to deal with unequal status effects and self-image problems stemming from *juku* attendance and nonattendance.

More important losses, however, occur in terms of the curriculum and of the notion of the classroom group as a community. The educational outlook of some students is restricted to a narrow content range (only that covered on tests). Teachers lack the freedom to use after-school time for additional educational activities, and teachers feel constrained in what they may teach. Exam-oriented students and parents demand adequate coverage of content contained in the examinations; additional school work, no matter how

creative or educationally engaging, is problematic for those who attend *juku* and have no extra time, especially for nonexamination activities. Teachers at Umi were well aware of the after-school demands placed on their students and did not want to add increased time pressures and school work demands, but then what happens for those who do not attend *juku*?

The notion of the classroom group progressing together is destroyed when students who attend *juku* are obviously progressing at a different pace than those who do not attend. Furthermore, at Umi, one student did not attend school the entire last trimester to stay at home to prepare for entrance examinations with his mother. On examination days, only six or seven students attended school.[27] The most obvious contradiction is that the elementary school curriculum and goals are much broader than the examinations, and schools cannot and do not want to provide the kind of intense preparation that individual tutors or *juku* can provide. As a result, students more focused on examination performance are consequently less focused on their elementary school life and less concerned about their peers and broader school and teacher priorities.

Unfortunately, the worst effects are probably felt most by the students themselves. Although most students observed in this study seemed well adjusted and happy whether or not they attended *juku* or had much playtime, teachers commented on the more relaxed demeanor and settled hearts of students after completing entrance examinations. They especially remarked about a personality change for one boy (Oda-kun) who reported some of the longest *juku* hours on my questionnaires. Even though he did not pass his exams, he felt greatly relieved and was a calmer, kinder student. As an outside observer (reinforced by many Japanese informants), I felt sad that a few 11- and 12-year-old lives were so programmed that they referred to their free time whenever they did not have specific activities to

do as “rest” time (and some had only a few hours per week counting all the hours between 7 a.m. and bedtime 7 days a week). What happens to people as adults if as sixth graders they had no playtime outside school? Most pitiful, however, are those faced with a true dilemma—to enjoy the freedom and playtime of childhood and potentially ruin their chances to enter certain university and career paths or to sacrifice childhood play hours and freedom in order to increase the chances for a bright future guaranteed by entrance into certain universities.

Should an 11- or 12-year-olds current life and future be so clearly programmed? What kind of culture has been created where people must choose between their desired childhood or their desired adulthood? For some students, why must the choice be one of either play and enjoy free time after school or study those hours for the opportunity (no assurance) to secure the career path for the rest of their life? To be faced with that kind of an either-or choice at that age for both parents and students is a tragic consequence of the examination system. I will never forget the pensive, sad look on Arao-kun’s mother’s face as she explained her philosophy for not enrolling Arao-kun in *juku* in the fifth grade. “Children should enjoy their childhood. Boys should play baseball after school and have some free time to explore.” Then, she added hesitantly, “Shouldn’t they?” In her hesitancy and searching gaze, her last question was posed almost as though she had committed a crime to allow her son to play when his peers were moving up the academic ladder at a faster pace because they spent their after-school hours studying and going to *juku*. The real crime seems to be a system that places parents and students in such a troublesome bind with such an undesired set of alternatives.

To think that by allowing children the right to play and enjoy their childhood parents might be handicapping their children’s future life plans

must present a terribly pressured and dismal predicament. To compound the problem, parents must not only have the philosophical stance to be able to sacrifice childhood play for possible future gains but also the economic means to be able to enter into such intense preparation. In an interesting twist of fate, the examination system, originally set up to ensure "equality of opportunity" and justified as an "objective" means of selecting the top candidates, has fallen prey to educational circumstances in which those in the upper echelons have greater chances and in fact secure a greater percentage of admissions into the top universities (Fujita, 1989). *The juku* industry has blossomed into a multi-billion-dollar industry so that "equal" chances no longer exist in reality (U.S. Department of Education, 1987).

The employment system and the entrance examination system share responsibility for the pressures placed on the precollegiate educational system. The standards for acceptance and advancement are so singular and rigid that other options are nearly impossible if a person's ultimate goals are to work for a certain company or government bureau at a certain management level. Although calls for reform continue, the primary determinant for elite school and college admissions remains the entrance examination scores.

No Japanese parent or educator who I interviewed spoke warmly or highly of the examination system pressures, and most do not join the intensive preparation route.[28] But they concede that those with certain aspirations and those who are involved have little choice. Students who attended *juku* did not seem to mind. To them, *juku* was a part of their daily life, just like school. The path has been established for them; students may be hopelessly lost if they choose to leave the path. Parents justify sending their children to *juku* for so many hours because the path is so much more predictable: entering the right middle schools will likely lead to high

schools, which will likely lead to prestigious universities. Though the diploma-career path may be clear, the path for the educational system, for self-fulfillment, and for Japanese society is debatable. Where will this path lead?

This discussion raises many pertinent questions regarding equity. For instance, what kinds of future leaders will emerge from these prestigious universities if they have spent so much of their childhood years concentrating on an individually competitive quest, relatively isolated from playmates and community participation, and involved in less traditional Japanese pursuits? What may be the impact on future worker skills and knowledge with increasing numbers having ignored or discredited the broader range of moral, social, physical, cognitive, and aesthetic skills stressed in the elementary school curriculum? Some of the most successful students on the entrance examinations were the most selfish, self-centered, status-conscious, or boastful students without generous, kind hearts toward others, especially toward lower achievers. In contrast, some of the most kind, gentle, socially minded, and thoughtful students might never become leaders because they could not afford to enroll in *juku* or they refused to jump onto *the juku* bandwagon. Many of Japan's brightest, most well-rounded, and capable students may be denied positions because they did not follow the path to attend the top universities.

For example, Arao-kun and his mother disliked the *juku* pressure, so he attended *juku* just a few hours per week in sixth grade. He did not take entrance examinations to elite middle schools, advanced to the local public school, and his future is uncertain. Yet he is a bright, competent boy with an attractive personality; he scored highest on the IQ test, and he ably performed his class leader responsibility because of his strong social skills

and kind heart. His average grades reflect only relative achievement in comparison to peers who study 20 to 30 hours more per week.

Perhaps an even more unfortunate impact of a system that encourages so much outside study for some students is the negative implications for those who do not attend *juku*. Because he had average grades and his peers had already mastered material at *juku* before it was presented in the regular school classroom, Arao-kun felt he was “dumb.” Other students also referred to students who go to *juku* as “smart” and those who do not as “dumb.” Sadly, when I asked Mori students about *juku*, several of them answered that they do not go to *juku* because only “smart” students go. Student definitions of smart and dumb based greatly on *juku* attendance—which reflects family aspirations and wealth irrespective of actual “smartness”—may be the most deleterious effect of the examination system.

Thus, the simple phrase, “I do not go to *juku*,” is no longer a mere statement of fact. A mixture of self-image, family background, and social status implications combine to give the phrase loaded connotations. Moreover, the significance differs relative to peers, the classroom, school, and community context: a Mori student becomes one of the gang by uttering the phrase or may never even consider it important, while an Umi student becomes a loner or cannot ever forget it because of constant reminders surrounding him or her. Hence, even though the overall tenor of the two classrooms was cooperative and enjoyable, the sense of community differed and therefore classroom relations also differed significantly for certain students.

In Mr. Seki’s class, a clear academic hierarchy existed that tended to parallel class participation and social interaction patterns. Within 1 day of observation, I had detected who were the “smart” students and who were

the “least able.” A clear status hierarchy existed that influenced who helped whom, who asked whom questions, and who played with whom during breaks. Cliques and best friends were obvious. Like the individual nature of the seating arrangement, students worked independently and socialized individually or in their respective cliques. More Umi students revealed self-centered and independent thinking styles than those at Mori.

In contrast, I observed Mr. Ito’s class an entire month before I could discern some stable social interaction patterns. The academic hierarchy was not clear. Mr. Ito did call on some students more often: some because they were more reliably correct or gave more thought-provoking answers and some because they were unable to answer and then he would work through the answer while the rest of the class watched or helped. A few friendship pairs or groups were detectable, but as soon as I thought I had a few mapped out, they changed or added members. No exclusive cliques were evident. I detected no loners like I did in Mr. Seki’s class. Students worked interdependently, often in mutual collaboration, and they socialized in mixed groupings.

Reasons for such a difference in classroom interaction patterns can only be inferred; firm judgments are not warranted. Many factors undoubtedly contribute to the observed differences, including differences in neighborhood communities, family backgrounds, and economic resources. For example, Mori’s neighborhood and living arrangements are more closely knit, and people look after one another. With increased wealth and educational attainment, social status concerns seem heightened at Umi, whereas social status distinctions seem less important within Mori’s group. More traditional values are apparent in Mori families and community activities, the types of after-school activities, community celebrations and organizations, and extended family and crowded living arrangements. For

instance, an important neighborhood organization is the children's association (*kodomokai*) run by parents to provide recreational and enrichment activities to students during school vacations. It also serves a critical community-building function and a means to train children for future roles in their community, especially maintaining community traditions and festival celebrations. Most Mori students participated in their *kodomokai*, whereas most Umi students did not participate, and many had never heard of such an organization.

Based on the two schools in this study, a marked class difference in the kinds and amounts of after-school educational activities exists that may have major implications for the future career prospects and the kinds of workers and leaders running Japanese society in the next generation. Students bound for college and elite university education are involved in less community-oriented and traditional Japanese activities and enjoy less free time and social interaction time with friends than students with less certain college futures. Examination preparation is essentially an individual act: competing with peers. *Juku* attendance is social (in an elitist way) and enjoyable for some students, but study time is inherently individual. Less time to socialize or play informally or to participate in community organizations exacerbates the individual nature of examination preparation.

But the fact that almost all students, rich or poor, participate in some kind of educational enrichment activities outside school significantly reveals parents' priorities regarding children's growth and development and how families spend their disposable income. Although *juku* costs money, it is affordable for families with modest incomes.

Mori parents entrust more to schools and teachers to safeguard their children's education. At the elementary level, they prefer to emphasize whole-person development, especially their children's social skills and

interpersonal relations. They feel sorry for children involved in entrance examination preparation who focus on books and test score performance rather than on friends and play. In contrast, Umi students spend a much larger proportion of their time in examination preparation, focusing on what to learn for tests rather than on other aspects of the elementary school curriculum. Umi parents do not entrust their children's education to schools, since *juku* attendance is believed to be necessary to advance ahead of peers. According to teacher reports, social, physical, and daily life skills of Umi students tend to be weak. Parents are more concerned about the progress of their own child and his or her class ranking apart from the progress of the group and are especially concerned with their own child's chances of entering the desired middle school.

Besides possible family and community effects, specific school and classroom organization mechanisms reinforced the trends reported here. Umi students did not come to school in resident-based walk-to-school groups as they did at Mori. Instead, they arrived individually or in pairs with nearby friends. Over the summer, Mori students had neighborhood-based cleaning, study, and playgroup times, whereas Umi students had no time for such activities since most went to full-time *juku*.

Mr. Ito and Mr. Seki differed in six specific ways of teaching-learning that may have influenced cooperation and socialization patterns: (1) Mr. Ito did not have a public evaluation mechanism. (2) He had no status-differentiated roles like *han-cho*. (3) He encouraged students to clap for one another and praise one another more often, though by the time I began observing the students, they supported one another with praise and applause naturally without his prompting.

(4) Mr. Ito told stories that emphasized cooperation. (5) He repeated the notion that basic to life as human beings is our interdependence, and that a

good human being with a good heart is sensitive to those around him or her. (6) Finally, his class engaged in more community activities, such as choral singing, poetry recitation, and group performances, and in less individual activities, such as test taking.

A more public evaluation system coupled with status-conscious *juku* attendance seemed to exert the strongest influence on status differentiation and on the formation of cliques that reflected more individualistic interaction patterns. Mr. Seki did not encourage the cliques. By praising and helping rather than ostracizing some lower-achieving students, he may have fostered a better community spirit compared with previous years. But he did not stress community and cooperative activities as much as Mr. Ito or other teachers I observed. Sometimes a serendipitous mixture of personalities helps or hinders the community-building process. As sixth graders mixed in different groupings, some isolates in Mr. Seki's class found friends and were happier as a result. The most noticeable difference was Wong-san, who had made some friends and consequently exhibited a much more cheerful demeanor and had companions during class and break times.

The more obvious delegation of ongoing disciplining and student control to student leaders at Umi created a power differential, but it did not seem to strongly impact student relations. Student leaders did not abuse their powers; instead their responsibilities seemed more routine. But it may have disrupted the sense of togetherness or at least the more equal sense of community that Mori students exhibited. Clearly, students can be just as fair or unfair in their treatment of each other as teachers can be, whether or not *han-cho* roles exist. Mr. Seki purposefully delegated more duties to students to develop leadership skills, and students had to learn to assume more responsibility in his classroom, whereas Mr. Ito purposefully refrained from delegating some duties to students, and, as a result, he retained more control

over running class meetings and other classroom details. Mr. Ito's students had much more of a sixth sense. They anticipated what needed to be done and did it without needing instruction. They automatically helped each other (and picked on each other) indiscriminately. Their sense of community appeared to be stronger.

However, these interaction patterns may reflect family and community backgrounds more than specific teaching styles or methods. Many factors undoubtedly contribute to the difference. Mr. Ito himself said his students' interaction patterns came naturally to the students. Compared with previous grade levels, Mr. Seki's students formed more of a community with less bullying than before (reported in teacher and student interviews). Much more focused research in other schools needs to be undertaken to be able to clarify the problems and issues and to construct more dependable inferences regarding the impact of specific strategies on community building and on social relations within classrooms.[29]

Experiencing life with these students, I realized there is an important success/failure equilibrium and an inclusion/exclusion equilibrium at work in their daily lives. They should experience some moments at both ends of each spectrum. Hopefully the balance for each student ought to be weighted toward the success and inclusion ends throughout each day as well as throughout the school year. Some students need more opportunities to experience some sort of success and recognition amidst the more usual average performance, failure, or struggle, whereas other students need to experience some sort of failure and need to struggle and depend on others for success amidst the more usual success they accomplish as individuals. In their daily interactions, teachers were sensitive to these students and were careful to balance their praise and reprimands. For example, even while standing for punishment for having forgotten his math textbook, Mr.

Seki called on Koyama-kun when he knew the correct answer. Or, when the usually successful Ogawa-kun spoke out of turn, Mr. Seki was quick to reprimand him.

Providing a wide variety of activities and numerous avenues for assessing abilities enables a broad range of students to experience such success and inclusion. Thus, in the day-to-day success/failure equilibrium of classroom life, diverse opportunities for students to discover and develop their capabilities were critical moments for them and for valuing individual contributions to the group as a whole.

5.5 Teaching-Learning as Intersecting Spheres of Instruction: Teachers and Students Together and Apart

In the observed classrooms, the most striking realization was the amount of teaching-learning occurring between students and teachers in varied levels of individual, small-group, whole-group, and cross-grade interactions. Even when the teacher was lecturing or when students were not supposed to be talking, I noted ongoing instances of student talk: monologues, dialogues, conversations, questions, commands, and reprimands. The symphony of conversations were both authorized and unauthorized in formal and informal ways. Some conversations were scripted and planned, whereas others were spontaneous improvisations. These fluid conversations and groupings form intersecting spheres of influence on student learning. As a combined means of effecting teaching-learning events, they constitute spheres of instruction.

Whether by explicit and purposeful design or not, teaching, learning, and class management were processes characterized more by spheres of instruction rather than by a linear or singular process of instruction or management from the teacher to the students or from certain students to other students. For any given subject matter or activity, teachers may

provide the central or core sphere of instruction, but students dip in and out of that sphere and create spheres of their own in their authorized and unauthorized interactions. Conceptualizing classroom instruction as numerous, simultaneous, intersecting, and interacting spheres of instruction, both student and teacher initiated, points to the centrality of the nature of interpersonal relations within each classroom and within the total school context in order to determine the nature of the educational experience for each student.

At its broadest conception, each relational moment is a possible teaching-learning moment, especially considering whole-person education as the main goal. Therefore, *together* and *apart* become quite meaningful terms: when, where, and how teachers and students are together and apart influence the nature of the learning situation for each student.

The process is sometimes more like a complex musical score: the teacher provides the main melody, but students, both individually and collectively, contribute harmonious and conflicting subthemes. For instance, even while the teacher guides the main course of instruction, individual students talk aloud to themselves, and partners or small groups of students consult. When in harmony, their peer instruction helps more students to understand and remember; their talk amplifies the main theme supplied by the teacher. In this manner, they learn from each other as well as from the teacher. Some students lose the main theme but recapture the melody with the help of friends or the teacher. Or, the teacher may be distracted momentarily from the main course or veer off the track to incorporate student concerns. Sometimes the process is more like multiple melodies with no relation to each other, or sometimes students sing in rounds, always a phrase behind but in tune with the main melody. Some students are just off tune. Although most students stay with the main tune, some students may stray a bit,

sometimes clashing but mostly on key. The stray notes are so momentary that teachers usually ignore them even if they clash.

Undoubtedly, with large class sizes and a nontracked range of achievement levels, the peer tutoring subspheres of teaching-learning comprise an essential ingredient for instructional success and/or failure in the observed Japanese classrooms. Furthermore, students are together without the teacher during much noninstructional time. In a sense, because of the importance and effectiveness of peer and teacher spheres, feedback is continual, even though individual teacher-student interaction is minimal. In fact, targeting teacher talk and teacher instruction may reveal just one of several important spheres of instruction occurring in classrooms. I found time-on-task impossible to determine with so many complex, interacting means of teaching-learning occurring throughout the day.

Mr. Ito made more explicit, formal use of consultation and reflection time to reinforce instruction. If enough hands were not raised or the same people kept raising their hands, he would tell them to consult with each other for a minute. On a few occasions, he asked those who did not understand to raise their hands and told those who did understand to help them. He sometimes ended a class session by having students close their eyes and summarize the lesson in their heads, then write their reflections in their notebooks. To end a day or to calm students down after an exciting activity, he would have them sit on their desks in contemplative postures, close their eyes, and reflect in silence. Once, when their basketball passing ability was poor, students had to retreat to a practice area and teach each other the skill in groups of three. When all members of a group had learned the technique, they could return to the basketball court. At Umi, after the teacher presented the math lesson, the students had to work in their *han* and were not finished until everyone in their *han* understood the lesson. Mr. Seki used individual

seat-work time for students to come to his desk with questions or for students to ask friends for help.

Each student experiences differing degrees of involvement with and relations between the teacher and fellow students. This has both positive and negative implications depending on the relative effectiveness of the teacher and students as teachers and learners and on the overall positive or negative environment surrounding each instance. Someone who consistently receives help without even having to ask enjoys a vastly different educational experience than someone who rarely receives attention even with direct pleas for help. Wong-san's experience without friends in Mr. Seki's class compared with having a few friends in her sixth-grade class is a prime example.

What kinds of spheres of instruction exist? Chapter 6 examines them more closely, but broadly the main breakdown is teacher-centered or teacher-initiated spheres and peer- or student-centered and student-initiated spheres, both formal and informal. Formal spheres consist of authorized or planned instructional activities and processes; informal modes are unauthorized or spontaneous instructional activities and processes. With whole-person education as a priority, instruction (teaching-learning) pertains to any area of student and school life, such as subject matters, other activities, class management, and personal areas. The most common type of formal subject matter instruction was teachers teaching to the class as a whole. The most common informal form was student peer consultation, followed by student-initiated contact with teachers. The latter usually resulted in the same students receiving more teacher attention because they were more outgoing or demanding. Because individual teacher-student contact is limited, between-student interaction takes on increasing significance.

Within each sphere of instruction, determining status differentials, the roles students play, the nature of their involvement and of interpersonal relations, and the manner in which teaching-learning is accomplished are vital aspects for deciphering an individual student's inclusion and exclusion in these various spheres of instruction. Variation in intellectual, representational, and social forms becomes important because most students do not excel in all nine subject matters. In the observed cases, "experts" changed with the type of activity or social arrangements—most students did experience success in some subject matters or activities. For example, Nakano-kun did not do well in math, but he could produce finely detailed drawings in art and science. For Shibuya-san, reading was a struggle, but her recitation of *tanka* at the parents' performance day was moving, and her social skills could be praised. Conversely, Ogawa-kun excelled in academic subjects, but his social skills needed work. One boy found math easy but needed help from his friend in gym; and for his friend, gym was easy, but math was not. Or, the baseball star needed help in the pool, while a good swimmer needed help catching a ball. One shy boy who was below grade level in reading and math enthusiastically reported his third-place finish in the district swim meet because he had scored points for his school.

One boy rarely understood math on his own, but after receiving help from his neighbors, he could do the drills, whereas another boy did not like talking to or working with others during class and instead preferred to work on his own. Some students in Mr. Ito's class could not do several gymnastics stunts as individuals, but when combined in small groups they could perform cooperative stunts successfully. Or, the sixth graders never completed the most difficult cooperative stunt, the "Tokyo tower,"[30] as a whole group during regular course work, but at the sports day each group successfully completed its towers. Everyone was just as surprised as they

were elated at this feat of combined efforts and togetherness. There was a momentary hush as the last student stood and each tower was complete, then proud applause and incredulous murmurs, praise (*sugoi! umail*), and cheers from parents and students as they left the playground. Later, Mr. Ito confided he never anticipated perfect success, but because the students were performing for their families he was not completely surprised. He explained that student achievement in some areas is greater when performing in front of parents than in daily classroom lessons. This is also the reason he and his fellow teacher, Mrs. Horio, added a performance day (*happyokai*) to their event schedule, and they included areas not assessed in tests, such as dance, physical education, poetry recitation, singing, and playing musical instruments.

Thus, in the course of daily classroom life, the degree of student access to learning opportunities is impacted by innumerable elements in the classroom environment, heavily influenced by his or her own personality, outside-school life, and family, community, and personal backgrounds. Outside-school influences form a complex array of spheres of instruction in each students life. One way to judge the relative inclusion or exclusion of individual students in various aspects of classroom life is to identify the kinds of spheres of instruction at work, then investigate individual involvement in these spheres of instruction and subsequently their relative success or failure using many criteria. In this regard, the goal may be toward maximizing inclusion and success for all students, but the reality is that each student will experience varying degrees along each continuum.

For equality of educational opportunity, equity—not equality—needs to guide judgments, actions, communications, and decisions. Teachers can influence individual student inclusion and exclusion by awareness of these spheres of instruction and the nature of student involvement. Teachers need

to recognize which personalities, inside-school and outside-school influences, and status variables affect more exclusion or inclusion in peer and teacher spheres of instruction. For equity sake, they should try to tailor their reactions to students to mitigate or temper those inequities. Teachers guide the classroom climate by the types of spheres of instruction they engender and allow, which then determine the kind and amount of individual and group participation. Chapter 6 probes further into these spheres of instruction, including feedback, authority and control mechanisms, and other areas influencing sphere multiplicity and quality.

Notes

1. Mr. Seki's classroom was the only one I observed in this configuration. The paired rows of desks in Mr. Ito's classroom was a common configuration. Many different arrangements can be found.
2. In this chapter, references to Mori and Umi refer to data collected only from the two classrooms observed daily, unless otherwise noted. The family and home data, subject matter ratings, and student opinions about school were collected on a written questionnaire administered during class time to all students during the beginning of the observation period (February-March 1988). A total of 34 of 37 Mori students turned in questionnaires (3 students were absent), while all 32 students at Umi returned questionnaires. Future occupation data were solicited in formal individual student interviews conducted in March 1988 at Umi and in July 1988 at Mori.
3. Students from divorced households were not necessarily being dishonest. Some of these students may not even be aware of a divorce and reported that they "lived with" both parents because that may be their understanding of the situation. It is not rare for students not to see

their fathers every day, either due to transfers or long work hours. Fathers, who are transferred to workplaces far from home, may move to the new area and live alone. This situation is common enough to have its own word ascribed to it: *tanshinfunin* (transfer alone). The move is supposed to be temporary but may last several years. The mother and children stay in the same place, especially if the school district is strong, so that the children's education will not be disrupted. Even though fathers may not be present on a daily basis, they are still considered part of the family, and therefore students report "living with" them.

4. Although the questionnaire did not ask for information about pets, in both classes students asked if they should include pets in their answer to the question, "Who lives with them in their homes?" It is a nice reflection of the students' perspectives and opinions, so I have included the information here.
5. This principal felt such questions may encroach on their privacy, especially in revealing student economic backgrounds. Sensitivity to information that may reveal minority status also precludes asking for certain kinds of information.
6. The average Japanese family lives in much smaller homes than Americans, especially in large urban areas such as Tokyo. Both the number of rooms is smaller and the size of each room is generally smaller. A standard-sized room is 9 by 12 feet; and a family of four may live in an apartment with two of these rooms and a kitchen. Some may have extra rooms, sometimes half to two-thirds the size of the standard rooms. Umi students tend to live in larger, nicer-than-average homes.

7. To this day, I cannot decipher some of their phrases. Their language was a mix of local *shitamachi* slang and dialects of the countryside regions from which their families originate. Discrimination and status differences exist based on these dialects, in some ways similar to accents in the United States, such as southern, Brooklyn, or Bostonian. And within those larger categories, finer distinctions are made among those who know. Many Japanese speak standard Tokyo dialect in public but use another dialect in private.
8. Preparing for entrance examinations involves individual study, hiring a private tutor, and enrolling in academic *juku*, or some combination of these options. *Juku* are private after-school cram schools oriented toward academic subject study. There are two basic types: advanced study and review. To the dismay of many teachers and some parents and students, this has become a so-called second school system in Japan with troublesome implications for students, their families, and the public school system.
9. The questionnaire regarding summer plans for travel, *juku*, study, and playtimes was administered informally just before the July break, so the response rate was lower: 23 of 32 Umi students, 31 of 37 Mori students.
10. The trend of *juku* attendance from first through ninth grades is reported in a U.S. Department of Education report (1987, p. 12). Although the report does not distinguish between review *juku* and advanced *juku*, students do. The purpose of review *juku* is to review material covered in regular school classes and to provide remedial instruction where needed. Advanced *juku*, on the other hand, provides accelerated study in subject matters covered on entrance examinations, mainly math and

Japanese, with some science and social studies for elementary students.

11. "Free" is written within quotation marks because some students' lives are so programmed that they have very few hours of free time outside school. Most Japanese children, however, have many hours of free time.
12. The time chart was administered in sixth grade, so activity participation changed from the first questionnaire completed in fifth grade. Three Mori students began some sort of *juku* in sixth grade. Because participation was voluntary, I received 31 of 37 time-use charts from Mr. Ito's students and 23 of 32 charts from Mr. Seki's students.
13. These traditional martial arts combine athletic, spiritual, mental, and spatial awareness and skills. *Karate* and *judo* involve physical and spiritual training in ritualized hand and body "combat." *Kendo* is a form of Japanese fencing that uses a bamboo "sword." Like *karate* and *judo, kendo* is also highly ritualized and involves physical and spiritual training.
14. The school week refers to the Monday through Saturday schedule. Sunday is analyzed separately.
15. IQ tests are administered at the beginning of second, fourth, and sixth grades in Tokyo. School districts select from different companies' versions, so Umi and Mori administered different tests. In Osaka, IQ tests are outlawed because of possible discrimination against minority groups.
16. IQ data come from sixth-grade reporting. Some students who did not go to *juku* as fifth graders began *juku* in sixth grade (including Arao-kun).

17. In Tokyo, special-needs students are assigned to separate special education schools. Although some schools have separate and mainstreamed classrooms within the school, mainstreaming is not a commonplace practice. However, parents have the right to send their child to a regular school as long as the student is not terribly disruptive to the class proceedings. The trade-off for their child not receiving more individual attention and special education in a separate school setting is more socialization and greater fellowship with students in the neighborhood. I do not have enough background in the area of special education to be able to assess the levels of special-needs students in regular classrooms, but five obvious cases existed in the six classrooms I observed in Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagano.
18. Based on my observations, severe forms of bullying and isolation seem rare, but the extent and degree to which these cases exist need to be researched with great care. According to Japanese informants, the practice is more common than my observations suggest. However, precise definition and observation of the kinds and extent of isolation and bullying need to be documented to be able to gauge the nature of the problem. Expectations and assessment of kind, gentle treatment or rough, discriminatory treatment are very relative and contextually dependent. Many Japanese report having been bullied or isolated, which may be true, but what they report as bullying may be considered commonplace by American standards or may be trivial in an American setting where the major worry is students carrying weapons to school. Another problem is that given the exact same experience, one Japanese student may feel he or she was bullied, whereas another student may not even notice it happened or may easily brush it aside. The same is true for American students. For example, growing up with three

brothers, I did not pay attention to a few punches or disparaging remarks on the playground that my girlfriend, an only child, found “horrifying.” This does not dismiss the emotional trauma that any degree of bullying or teasing may have on a particular individual; this is only to point out the difficulty in evaluating and analyzing reported data on this issue.

19. Interestingly, because most everyone has been through the school system, especially the elementary school level, everyone has their image of “typical” gauged relative to their own experience, and most like to express their opinions about that. Again, images of “typical” are just as varied as the schools and classrooms we try to peg into a “typical” group.
20. “Kun” is a name ending used to address and to refer to younger males, especially boys. Usually, “san” is used to address adults and girls, but “kun” is used for boys. Some teachers (more likely female teachers) use the diminutive “chan” to refer to boys and girls, which has a more intimate and childlike connotation. Within a family, parents often call their children by their name or nickname with”chan” added to the end. I will use “kun” and “san” to distinguish boys from girls.
21. As an American observer, one enviable facet is that student behavior does not change much when teachers enter and leave the classroom, especially if students are engaged in some activity or school work. Slightly more chatter and off-task behaviors occur but not significantly more. With or without the teacher present, not much”cheating” occurs, just occasional glances at a neighbor’s work during tests. Otherwise, consulting and helping each other do drills and homework are not considered “cheating.”

22. Many historical nonfiction books are written in comic book form to appeal to children (and grown-ups!). Comic books cover topics in all subject matters.
23. Comments like these are not truly asking for an answer. The clear but purposefully indirect message in these cases is “cut it out.”
24. Arita is a small pottery town in southern Japan on the island of Kyushu.
25. I never told the students or Mr. Ito what kind of school or students I had visited. I was careful just to describe a few things I saw (relevant to their questions) but not to hint at what I felt about them. If I felt some questions would give away these sorts of clues, I would respond that I did not know. Mr. Ito was a good friend of Mr. Toyota, who introduced me to Umi, though he did not know the teacher whom I was observing. The students and he seemed to take pride in this characterization as opposed to taking offense, but I do not know if other underlying implications existed.
26. Sumo wrestling is a traditional Japanese sport. Wrestlers are ranked after each tournament (six major ones per year) based on their performance (win-loss record). If they do consistently well in one major ranking, they are promoted to the next in a complicated judgment procedure. In Mr. Seki’s class, only perfect scores were eligible to move up a ranking. In order to advance to the topmost rankings, students had to receive several perfect scores in a row. As in sumo wrestling, if a person’s record worsens for one or more tournaments, he or she may be demoted. Once Mr. Seki’s students reached the topmost rankings, they also had to maintain perfect scores to stay on top.

27. Examinations are administered by each individual school. I do not know the numbers, but most private schools and selective public schools offer such examinations as the primary means to determine admission. Grade-point average and teacher recommendations are partially factored in because Umi teachers reported they spent an hour completing each application for their students. Some students applied to as many as six schools. Although entrance to public elementary schools is based on residence, entrance to public secondary schools is based on examination scores (see Rohlen, 1980, 1983).
28. Without having a larger sample size, generalizations are impossible to draw, but Umi students seem to be an extreme case. My guess is that most elementary students live more like Mori students, but this may have changed.
29. Unfortunately, I did not observe each Umi teacher long enough to warrant any inferences regarding the relationship between teaching strategies and classroom interaction patterns.
30. In this cooperative stunt, students formed human towers, three layers high, by standing on each other's shoulders. The bottom layer (about eight students) stood in a tight circle, putting their arms around each other's shoulders and putting their heads down and close together. The second layer (about five students) climbed on top, standing on the bottom layer's shoulders and forming another tight circle in the same manner. The top layer (one student) had to climb up the two layers to stand on the second tier and spread his or her arms. During practice, several towers fell and mats protected their fall. But during sports day, the stunts were done on the gravel playground surface. With or without mats, the stunt was dangerous and painful at times.

6
Classroom Instruction

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6.1 Introduction

Many mechanisms that support effective instructional processes are the same as those for effective peer and self-supervision, and hence the same as those for class management. At the core is a process of interpersonal relations characterized by mutual, ideally cooperative teaching and learning. The complex interaction of levels of teacher-student relations generates various spheres of instruction. Therefore, the first half of this chapter concentrates on social forms, including a general discussion of instruction, feedback and evaluation, and authority and control mechanisms in the two classrooms. Overall instructional patterns over time, rather than detailed analyses of minute-by-minute verbal and behavioral instruction, formed the focal point of this study. An in-depth content and instructional analysis is not possible for this book even though the data exist, but other researchers have detailed studies of specific subject matter instruction, most notably science and math (Fujioka, 1995; Lawson, 1999; Lewis, 2002; Lewis & Tsuchida, 1997, 1998; Linn, 2000; Ma, 1999; Mayer et al., 1995; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Stigler, Fernandez, & Yoshida, 1998; Stigler & Perry, 1988).

The second half of Chapter 6 illuminates 5 elements (6.5 a-e) that make essential contributions to the multiplicity and quality of these spheres of

instruction. Why these elements? In short, the variety of intellectual and representational forms refers to the wide range of learning activities, content, and duties whose skills and experiences enlist one's total sensory capacities. This, in turn, enriches the kinds of spheres of instruction available, broadens student access to those spheres, and elaborates upon the complex web of interacting spheres that may support and reinforce each other. Along with a complex set of multiability grouping patterns, various levels of self- and group identity are promoted and multiple forms of community consciousness are created through multiple means for students to get to know each other as individuals. Labels and categories are counterproductive in this fluid network of learning spheres; a fixed notion of ability loses meaning where achievement is clearly shaped by many environmental factors, such as the variety of forms and individual and group efforts. Together with the all-important norm of universal participation, students develop a secure sense of belonging and learn to work with everyone's strengths and weaknesses. And together with the belief that learning must mix hard work with fun, students acquire the will and motivation to learn.

Multiple groupings also allow for multiple role models—an important aspect of the teaching-learning process. Adults bear the responsibility as primary role models; implicitly, in their actions and reactions, they set an example that guides students. Actions are more powerful than words. Adult work arrangements, responsibilities, and obligations that mirror those requested of students are essential informal spheres of instruction both inside and outside school.

Communication and work patterns encompass a broad range of patterns: patterns of acting, thinking, feeling, speaking, and knowing. For example, goal setting, reflection, and self-evaluation are important means of securing

smooth working relations. Most revealing are nonverbal patterns of knowing that enable students to pay sensitive attention to others' feelings, acquire information through intuition, and come to understand and act without having to be told.

6.2 Instructional Patterns

Chapter 3 revealed that variety keeps each day lively so that the same subject taught in relatively the same manner does not seem monotonous. First and foremost, the observed Japanese teachers were impressive in five ways that facilitated active, engaged learning: (1) exhibiting developmental awareness regarding student learning and growth; (2) attending to the quality and kinds of direct experiences with varied forms of learning; (3) connecting studies with real-world applications, allowing for various forms of assessment; (4) delegating student leadership and class management through organized consistent principles and procedures; and (5) nurturing trusting relations between all members of the school and classroom community.

6.2a Underlying Principles for Teaching-Learning

Japanese teachers recognize a few fundamental principles that make subject matter instruction easy to understand. They exhibit a wisdom and developmental sensitivity in their instruction of each subject matter, with each new topic or skill, and in the course of a student's personal growth across a year and across the elementary school experience. In the long run, the first goal is exposure aimed at captivating student interest and relating studies to students' lives. Next, repeated practice incrementally develops their competence in order to deepen their comprehension and their appreciation of the topic. Maintaining motivation and fun is essential during the sometimes rote process of incorporating new skills. Lastly, once

students have perfected or incorporated the new ideas and skills, they can then branch out on their own, help others, and be creative.

With each new topic, four instructional lesson phases are distinguishable: introduction, “digestion,” review, and conclusion. Introductory aspects of lessons begin by relating concepts or problems to the students’ own experiences to make the new material accessible. Usually teachers begin with a question: either one so familiar that all students can contribute an answer or one that is puzzling and piques their curiosity to make some guesses. They strive to get as many hands raised and as many different voices contributing to the melody as possible. For example, before studying percentages, Mr. Ito asked students to give examples of how they had seen or heard percentages used. Students yelled out of turn or raised their hands to offer answers: weather reports! store sales! Once the teacher has generated attention and involvement with ideas familiar to the students, he or she asks follow-up questions to lead students to the problem of the day. Whole-group instruction is most common in this phase.

“Digestion” involves either a simple presentation of the material or a successively careful set of questions to lead students to discover the answers by themselves. Lecture or whole-group instruction is systematic, step-by-step, and clear so that students can understand enough to engage or interact with the material. Experiments or other activity-based learning experiences may enhance instruction. This phase branches out from whole-group instruction into small-group or individual instruction or whole-group instruction with much teacher-student interaction. During small-group or individual instruction, peer spheres of instruction predominate with only intermittent teacher comments.

Review aspects of lessons involve repeated exposure to basic concepts and drills to deepen comprehension and appreciation, or they may serve as a

springboard for individual study. Summarizing portions before moving to the next stage or set of activities may also occur. This reflective activity may be done in individual notebooks or as a group reflective activity. Once students have incorporated lesson content and made it their own, so to speak, concluding phases of lessons allow for skill perfection, teaching-learning from each other, and creation on one's own. In one example, after completing drills on a particular word problem, students wrote their own problems to give to fellow students to solve. Also, what may begin as rote work or copying notes off the board can lead to creative spin-offs once the basics have been internalized. In another example, students may have to practice certain embroidery stitches repeatedly, but the ultimate goal will be to create their own design for a book bag they will make. The careful incremental building of knowledge and skills carries throughout the daily curriculum and across the year and grade levels. The phases are not necessarily fixed, linear, or mutually exclusive of one another.

A second underlying principle is that direct experience, especially with one's whole body (*taiken*), is the primary means of learning and a necessary complement to textbook knowledge. Direct experience is built into many lessons in all subject matters, but certain subject matters regularly rely on direct experience with diverse materials—for example, art, home economics, physical education, calligraphy, and science experiments. Beyond these kinds of direct experience, club activities, student councils, field trips, special events, and ceremonies also cultivate sensory awareness and reinforce subject matter studies. For example, some student councils compile surveys and need to calculate percentages; others put together newsletters, posters, or skits. These skills were learned and utilized in math, social studies, art, and Japanese lessons, respectively.

Third, teachers recognize the situational nature of cognition and knowledge, and therefore of teaching and learning, along with social, emotional, and physical dimensions. Sensitivity to the importance of the situational context supports the observed mixture of learning activities, environments, and diverse opportunities for direct experience. Teachers strongly believe that changing the situation (in terms of grouping patterns, roles, content, learning media, or environments) brings forth different levels and kinds of engagement from various students. Some students can read and test well but placed in a less structured field-trip environment they have trouble knowing how to apply their skills. Other students can apply their knowledge and skills immediately with direct experience, even though they cannot describe in words what they know with their bodies. Still others may not test well after reading a book, but after an experiment or field trip they clearly understand and can apply the knowledge. One student listens to a description of the story setting and comprehends immediately, while another student needs someone to draw a picture. Another student cannot describe the character's reaction in a story, but he shows his understanding by acting out the part. Mr. Ito had students do more oral recitations, drawing, and acting to make Japanese stories and social studies come alive.

Besides varying the physical and social forms, teachers varied the type of intellectual activity involved in learning: listening, speaking, hypothesizing, summarizing, reflecting, planning, organizing, evaluating, categorizing, memorizing, synthesizing. For example, whole-group discussion can be followed by small-group problem solving or individual seat work, followed by individual or small-group presentations, and concluded with whole-group or individual reflection orally or in writing. Reflection (*hansei*) plays a vital role in summarizing, incorporating, creating, assessing, and reassessing new and old knowledge for each individual in the learning

process; it also serves as an invaluable self-evaluation mechanism for teaching-learning and for classroom management.

6.2b Kinds of Spheres of Instruction

Spheres of instruction may be construed on numerous levels. On one level, inside-school and outside-school spheres exist. Outside-school spheres are institutional and cultural, such as family, formal lessons, business, and community, and subspheres may be delineated within each of these spheres. Within-school spheres also maybe conceived in successive layers of smaller and smaller spheres, such as whole school, upper grades, grade level, classroom, *han*, paired desks, and individual. Within the classroom, teacher-centered or teacher-initiated spheres and student-centered or student-initiated spheres exist, both formal and informal. For example, *han* are formally established student-centered spheres, but many informal small groups of consulting students are spontaneously generated during lessons and breaks.

Spheres of instruction may also be construed in terms of the learner's relationship with materials, media, activities, and the nature of the participatory experience and in terms of the learners relations with other people and their type of involvement. For instance, the following criteria have a strong impact on student involvement: whether it is mandatory or voluntary, universal or special, punishment or reward, guaranteed or unpredictable, discriminatory or fair, and whether it is decided by selection, rotation, or election. Opportunities for learners to gain direct experience in a wide array of representational forms increase possible means of learning for individuals in their own sphere of instruction (an individual working alone with materials constitutes a sphere of instruction). Regarding relations with other people, the spheres broadly break down into whole-group relations, small-group relations, and individual relations. In the classroom context,

teacher-centered spheres consist of the teacher relating to the classroom as a whole group, to individual students, and to students in small groups. Student-centered spheres can be broken down into the same three categories: students relating to the whole group, to small groups, or to individuals.

The main sphere of instruction in the classroom is guided by the teacher. And teachers heavily influence the other types of spheres in the latitude and timing they allow for them to occur. Spheres are not necessarily mutually exclusive or easily identified. As mentioned earlier, they are interacting and intersecting in the course of classroom life. For example, an individual student maybe carrying on several conversations at once: while listening to the teacher, the student may talk out loud to himself, answer his neighbor's question in the same breath, then interrupt to offer advice to the quarreling pair behind him. These instantaneous shifts occur constantly across students as a whole group but only momentarily for most students as individuals. The observed interactions consist of numerous interruptions to dip into another peer sphere or others interrupting ones own paired conversation, then finishing ones sentence with one's neighbor—all while the teacher is "teaching."[1] These quips and phrases characterize utterances more than a series of successive complete sentences or thoughts. A frame-by-frame video analysis would be necessary to accurately diagram the interacting spheres.

From the teachers' vantage point, in order to present the main sphere of instruction, they talk over several moving bodies and subspheres of quiet commotion. They even break apart from their sphere to reprimand students who have exceeded an invisible boundary. Or they take a moment to answer an individual student's extraneous comment, creating still another recognizable though momentary sphere. The "front row" was a consistently

identifiable sphere of instruction because these students often had more access to the teacher's attention by virtue of proximity. Teachers reacted to their quips and questions with comments addressed to the whole class or even side mumbles to the particular individual or small group. Although school and classroom rules are the same as those in the United States (e.g., no talking while someone else is talking, listen to the teacher, no running in the halls), enforcement is clearly different. Their higher tolerance for peer talk resulted in many simultaneous spheres of instruction, and teachers differ from classroom to classroom.

Thus, one immediate realization in my observation notes was the absolute difficulty in categorizing instruction simply as whole group, small group, or individual, as though they were mutually exclusive or easily definable as U.S. research tends to report. Instead, I developed a complex notation system to identify which sets of students were "consulting," who initiated the talk, and who was giving or receiving assistance. As quickly as I wrote, I could never keep track of the whole class and instead had to target a few individuals. Even though teacher-designated categories of whole or small group could be technically identified, on an informal basis each teaching mode was at once a mix of whole-group, small-group, and individual work.

In other words, regardless of the teacher-designated structure, a constant underlying murmur could be heard. Each student alone showed an overall attentive front, but clarification questions and reactions to the lecture were made to partners or neighboring friends. Some students listened and watched the teacher, while others composed thoughts in their notebooks. During individual or small-group work, teachers announced comments to the whole group or to individual students. Teachers usually taught to the whole group from the front but wandered through the aisles during

individual work and either wandered to groups or worked at their desks during small-group instruction times.

Small-group work was usually the noisiest mode, since peer talk was the main authorized form of instruction. Talk during individual work and whole-group instruction was unauthorized though not punished; therefore, it was more subdued and held in check. I realized that attentive posturing and the direction in which students were facing were not necessarily clues as to what they were really listening to or to whom they were really speaking. One student who appeared attentive to the teacher looked puzzled when called on and said, “Huh?” (he was contained in his own sphere for the moment), whereas another student who was facing the back of the room and muttering some phrase to his neighbor behind him quickly turned to supply the desired answer when called on (he was involved in two spheres simultaneously). A boy tapped the girl in front of him for advice and she murmured a reply without blinking, turning, or moving a facial muscle except her tongue to formulate the words (he created an instantaneous sphere, while she either shifted from the teacher’s sphere to the newly created sphere or tuned into both).

The important notion is not to determine each and every sphere and the degree of involvement in each but rather to be aware of the importance of these long-term or instantaneous moments as potentially significant exchanges of teaching and learning. Students are differentially involved in the complex symphony, which may dramatically alter the learning situation for each individual.

While most individuals mainly worked on their own, they could turn to their neighbor for advice in an instant, or without even soliciting advice they could be redirected by a friend noticing a faulty move. They turned each other’s textbook pages to orient their friends, pointed to a paragraph to

guide an answer, wrote on friends' notebooks, and even erased an errant train of thought as their friend was writing. In Mr. Ito's class, these types of assistance happened with or without actual requests for help. Cheating is seen as bad and is verbally defined the same way by students in Japan and the United States: looking at someone else's test or notebook or getting an answer from a friend. But judging from classroom behavior where such assistance (except on tests) seems to be common, cheating is more loosely defined in the reality of classroom life. The fear that ongoing assistance will somehow harm the ability to learn on one's own or will lead to incomplete learning and lack of independence does not seem warranted based on the observed students. Quite the contrary, more students seemed enabled to learn and were able to achieve more thanks to this "cheating." Japanese students and adults express diverse opinions and reveal independent thinking and abilities to learn on their own.

From a researcher standpoint, if while the teacher is lecturing students talk to their neighbors and one student yells a comment and gets a response from the teacher, is this whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction at the same time? Likewise, during individual work time, usually student pairs consult, but they fluidly change from one to another by proximity: left, right, front, or back. Or sometimes a foursome erupts on a debatable point. Here, a small group has formed with individuals on the periphery dipping in and out. And the teacher might add an overlay by commenting to the group as a whole. Multiple spheres of instruction rather than a singular mode is actually in progress during most classroom instruction.

The percentage of on-task and off-task utterances seems irrelevant since conversations were a mixture of the main on-task thread with off-task comments tossed in and ignored or met with a chuckle at most. Or, even if

it meant a momentary tangent to the baseball diamond, students returned to the least common denominator just as quickly. Student talk, movement, and interruptions were generally on task, and those that were clearly off task were so momentary that teacher or fellow student reprimands may have been more disruptive than the quick detour itself. The movement and noise were a constant meandering flow of on-task and off-task moments.

As an observer, I was perplexed at the beginning (How do I take notes?) and disoriented (To whom am I supposed to listen?). And as an American, I wondered: How can they concentrate? But the on- and off-task talk were complementary, and rather than disrupt concentration, the talk seemed to be a reflection of it. I was captivated. Maybe rules of silence are for adults more than for students, and maybe that is why some students tune out in classrooms where silence is golden. In time, I realized the off-task moments seemed to somehow bolster the relations that maintained the on-task talk and moved student understanding forward to accomplish the teaching-learning tasks in the end.

For a teacher, the main limitation is insufficient time to help each individual student. Teachers differ in the amount and kind of individualization they accomplish. Umi students were more self-sufficient and worked independently (they also sat in single-file desks). Mr. Seki's handouts were his way of supplying additional work to faster students while he worked with students who did not understand the material. Mr. Ito did not provide work to keep faster students busy; rather he diversified materials, presentation modes, and explanations to reach more students. By aiming toward the average, slow and fast learners alike cannot be accommodated well. Fast learners are enlisted (by friends, not by teacher designation) to teach others, and in the act of explaining and teaching, greater understanding is achieved. Students themselves preferred getting

help from peers rather than asking the teacher. Consequently, peer spheres of instruction are of prime importance. And developing the kinds of communication patterns, relations, and the art of teaching and learning in students to be able to maximize the effectiveness of peer spheres is critical to the smooth classroom operations and instructional patterns. The quality of peer spheres is also important considering the large amount of time students spend without teacher supervision (e.g., recesses, breaks, duties, before and after school).

Importantly, even though teachers tend to formally relate much more to students as a whole group, informally they display great understanding of students as individuals. Almost like great chefs will know the ultimate flavors and smells of a dish from the individual seasonings they add without measure, teachers sensitively comprehend how differing personalities, strengths, and weaknesses will interact. Assigning students to the different classrooms of one grade level reveals the meticulous care and intricate understanding of the mix. They do not purposefully mix and match students within each classroom, however, because students would soon be able to detect teacher biases in their group designations. Therefore, groups within classrooms are most often determined by lottery, rotation, or student selection.

6.2c Examples of General Instructional Patterns by Subject Matter

Of the various spheres of instruction, the easiest one to accurately track is that of the teacher. Student spheres are more difficult to track because their exchanges are so quick, subtle, inaudible, or as an outsider, only partially comprehensible. Students in both classrooms believed Mr. Seki and Mr. Ito were “good” teachers. When asked why, their answers included the following: he plays with us; he is interesting; he has a good sense of humor;

he makes studies easy to understand; he uses different ways to explain things; and he does various things to help us understand.

Teacher instruction was clear, straightforward, and incremental. Every teacher I observed could write and draw neatly and clearly on the blackboard with a sense of spatial organization that was enviable. The content was divided into simple, easy-to-understand components for presentation. Lessons tended to follow certain patterns of instruction. This section describes the general pattern of instruction for each subject matter: math, social studies, science, Japanese, music, physical education, art, calligraphy, and moral education. The social studies section describes interesting discussion techniques that are also used in other subject matters. The techniques incorporate group and individual participatory modes that maximize student response or enable teachers to elicit individual student opinions, views, and contributions in a whole-group mode.

In mathematics, one or two problems were first presented as models followed by individual seat work. Before class or during their introductory remarks, teachers wrote or drew the problem clearly and neatly on the board. They started instruction by posing questions that related the phenomena to students' lives. Then they worked through the model problems step by step, making sure everyone understood each step. Sometimes they had students recite the problem aloud. Most often, they asked questions in such a way that students actually solved the problem together as a group. Usually, students spoke up at random, but sometimes the teachers called a name or asked for volunteers. If teachers heard differing answers, they paused, solicited more opinions, and asked students to raise their hands to vote on various propositions or at least to show their viewpoints. If teachers were in a hurry, they just incorporated the correct response without taking time to solicit other views.

After whole-group presentation of the model problems, teachers assigned problems from the textbook or drill booklet or occasionally a hands-on activity to supplement class work. During this “individual” work, teachers wandered through the aisles or had students show them their work to give individual attention and to gain a sense of the level of understanding. The period ended with individual work, or as a summary some students read their answers aloud or put their answers on the board and explained them to their classmates. Some periods started with students giving answers to the homework. Individual turns proceeded down the rows: each student called out an answer, and classmates had to respond (supposedly in unison), “I agree” or “I disagree.” If disagreement existed, teachers stepped in to help figure out which answer was correct. I only observed a few instances of students working in *han* during math.

During social studies, teachers lectured more often, and rather than talk the whole time, they interspersed their lectures with questions. The end result was more like a guided question-answer discussion with students as a whole group. The process ran similarly to that of introducing math problems as described above. Mr. Ito’s social studies lesson presented in Chapter 5 (Section 5.2b, classroom description about 1:50–2:30 p.m.) is a good example. Most often, questions were not the open-ended kind; rather teachers sought specific information. A common way to get a sense of individual opinion without asking each student individually was to solicit answers, asking who agreed and who disagreed with each answer. Among the disagreement, teachers then solicited more opinions or gave information and asked further questions to make students rethink or clarify a response. Usually if a student came close to the train of thought the teachers wanted to follow, they praised the answer, rephrased it, and continued providing the

intended information. Sometimes their discussion changed in response to a student question or comment that sparked an idea not planned in advance.

Teachers had interesting ways to make sure students understood and to maximize participation and solicit responses from individuals without having enough time to hear from each student individually. The expectation that after a student answers the group responds orally whether or not they agree is one example. The “I agree” answers were usually routinely uttered —and not by everyone—while the “I disagree” responses brought forth lively reactions or discussions. Teachers routinely asked for a show of hands to gain a sense of individual student thinking. Sometimes they simply asked, “Who understands?” and “Who does not understand?” Those who did not understand received the response and attention. Other times, teachers used this technique as a means of seeing which students endorsed one of several opinions or answers. Sometimes teachers followed up by calling on students to explain why they supported a particular answer; at other times, students simply voted, then teachers endorsed the correct answer to move the discussion/lecture along.

Teachers had varied ways to solicit student answers, but the most common was to call on people who raised their hands. If the same people kept raising their hands, teachers sometimes admonished others for not contributing. Mr. Ito sometimes compared boys and girls with little barbs like, “How come only the boys are raising their hands?” or “Oh, only girls know the answer?” The second most common method was just to call on someone at random. Sometimes teachers actually selected students whom they felt had more interesting or correct answers, or conversely, students whom they felt were not paying attention or did not understand, then they would help them come to an answer. For some questions, teachers purposefully called on people who needed a chance to redeem themselves,

such as those who had just made a mistake or those the teachers had just reprimanded. Ultimately, teachers wanted to get as many different people speaking up as possible, though typically the same people tended to raise their hands. One teacher had a deck of cards with a students name written on each card. He shuffled the deck and drew names to solicit responses. Sometimes teachers let students consult in groups before responding in order to increase participation. Mr. Ito often used this technique when three or less hands were raised to answer his question.

In Nagano, teachers had some compelling student-led discussion methods. In one science class, the teacher simply raised a question to start the lesson's discussion and to spark hypothesis generation. He called on a student, and once that student answered, he or she had control of the floor and called on the next student. Immediately after the student spoke, most students avidly raised their hands and called out their intended responses—a loud but contagious enthusiasm. No one seemed too shy to speak up. Important norms had been established, such as trying to call on someone who had not yet spoken and respectfully referring to the previous persons comment before offering a supplemental or dissenting view. One second-grade teacher had posted a flowchart showing the ideal discussion pattern: a figure-eight pattern, moving across the room, left to right, front to back, to spread the conversation to everyone.

Besides these lecture-discussion presentations, social studies lessons involved small-group work to review lessons and complete activities, such as group newspaper projects, library research, creating charts and graphs of agricultural production, or mapping. Individual seat work consisted of filling in handouts, illustrating parts of studies, occasional hands-on activities, or summing up lessons in notebooks. Field trips and art or science projects sometimes supplemented social studies lessons. Mr. Ito

often ended a lesson with a question that led the students to the next lesson's topic or with student reflection as a group or in their notebooks. Mr. Seki's students occasionally watched the social studies programs on educational television and summarized their reflections in their notebooks or in the discussion that followed.

Science instruction was divided into one single-period session and one double-period session for the weekly science experiment. The single-period session usually consisted of a lecture-discussion to introduce the concept and to review the textbook description of the upcoming experiment. Sometimes the lecture-discussion also involved hands-on activities, such as putting together an astronomy wheel to be able to chart the movement of the stars or constructing a box to be able to trace the path of light rays. Science experiments provided direct experience with the concepts or phenomena, and students always conducted their experiments in *han*. For example, I observed students capturing the gas released after mixing acid and water and testing to see whether it was oxygen or hydrogen; another time, students experimented with different objects to discover properties of sound conduction.

Teachers began the double period reviewing the procedures with picture-perfect drawings on the board or further explored the concept with a lecture-discussion, usually generating student hypotheses. Students quickly got to work, and different students had their roles to secure materials, clean up, help with the experiment, and record findings. Everyone had to keep their own observation records in their notebooks, including a drawing of the experiment setup, an explanation of the method and hypothesis, a summary of the findings, and a conclusion. Meanwhile, teachers walked around to various groups and responded to pleas for help or proud cries, "Look, teacher, we did it!" When appropriate, they called out warnings to students

or asked questions to encourage students to probe further. Besides cleanup, the end of the period was utilized for summary and reflection in small groups and in a whole-group mode. If there was insufficient time, they summarized later in the day or in their notebooks.

Notebooks were collected at the teachers' discretion, usually about once a week or every other week for each subject. When teachers asked for the notebooks, they were expected to be complete. Tests occurred after each unit in most subjects, quite regularly in math and Japanese, especially the dreaded *kanji* (Japanese characters) tests. As mentioned earlier, Mr. Ito usually gave the tests as study devices (meaning students corrected their own work, asked neighbors for help with wrong answers, and no scores were recorded), whereas Mr. Seki graded most tests himself and recorded each one for grading purposes. In both classes, students often had to correct their mistakes on tests and show the teacher.

Japanese study combined *kanji* drills, learning about language and grammar, reading comprehension, and writing. Lecture-discussion lessons consisted of reading passages aloud, discussing stories or grammar points, and sometimes word games to make *kanji* study a little less tedious. Individual work mainly involved *kanji* drills, reading, writing, and taking notes, possibly illustrating a story with artwork. In small work groups, students might practice reading and presenting plays or discussing parts of a story. Mr. Seki compiled student compositions and creative writing into notebooks for the class library so that students could share their work. Mr. Ito had students compose and illustrate their own poetry, then posted their work on the bulletin board.

There were three basic types of music classes: choral singing, playing instruments, and textbook study. Singing was usually done as a whole group, learning a variety of songs sung in unison or in alto and soprano

parts. I observed only a few solos at Mori's performance day, and otherwise students were embarrassed to sing alone in front of their peers. Playing instruments involved individual practice to learn songs on recorders or *kenban* (piano keyboard-type instrument) and group practice, such as playing as a band or playing songs in unison. During individual practice at Mori, students roamed about, formed their own groups, or practiced individually—standing, walking, sitting, or lying down. Charts were posted for each song, and once students successfully played the song for the teacher (during individual practice time), they could affix a sticker next to their name. Umi students generally remained in their seats practicing with their neighbor. Teachers wandered to different students to give individual or small-group assistance.

Special instruments for band were decided by volunteering. If too many people volunteered for the same instrument (e.g., most boys wanted to play the big drum), they decided by the rock-scissors-paper game. Fifth-sixth graders provide the band music for the sports day and fifth graders play for the graduation ceremony, so they spend a couple months before each of those events practicing their songs. Textbook study was less common and involved learning to read music and learning about composers and about all the instruments in an orchestra.

Because physical education, art, calligraphy, and home economics involve direct experiential activities without heavy reliance on textbook study, instructional formats were similar: teachers began the period by introducing the activity or skill to be learned with a bit of background information in a lecture-discussion mode. Then the rest of the class time was devoted to individual and small-group work or self-paced study on individual projects.

Physical education is the only required subject matter without a textbook. Mr. Seki handed out a basketball information booklet that explained different techniques for dribbling, passing, and play-making. Otherwise, classes began with warm-up exercises: Mr. Ito led his students in the same set of exercises each day, while the *han-cho* in Mr. Seki's class led students in their respective *han*. When introducing a new skill, teachers demonstrated the skill or had another student model it. Students set up and stored the equipment themselves, even the basketball nets (a backboard set in a heavy metal structure on wheels). Wheeling these nets onto the courts necessitated a group effort. Girls and boys set up their own respective courts.

Depending on the sport, students practiced in small groups or played together in teams. For gymnastics (mat and vaulting horse), students worked in small groups with their own mats and horses; for basketball, soccer, and softball, students played in teams, boys separate from girls; and for swimming and track and field, students waited in line for their individual chance to swim their lap, do long jump, hurdles, or running. As needed, teachers commented on ways to improve skills and helped students perform stunts. At the end of the period, Mr. Ito had students do the stunts one by one. He provided constructive feedback or praise, while fellow students watched and cheered for each other. During games, teachers officiated one game, while students officiated themselves in the other. Each class ended with a set of cool-down exercises.

Art teachers began with a brief guided discussion and explanation of the main concept (color, lighting, perspective, design issues), soliciting responses from students. For introductory lessons, they explained the materials and procedures and showed samples of student work from other classes or from the textbook. Textbooks are filled with colorful, attractive

pictures of student work that serve as models for each art project. Whether explanations were brief or long, students inevitably needed help once they got started and relied on their friends or the teacher. Most students went right to work, but at any given time students wandered and goofed off. Chatter and movement were allowed within limits. Teachers spent most of their time helping students procure materials, responding to individual requests for help, and reprimanding students who were wandering too much. Otherwise teachers walked around to comment on students' work at their desks.

Mori students generally stayed in their groups but freely changed groupings and moved around, while Umi students generally stayed with their *han* and only certain students wandered. In spite of the overall informal atmosphere of wandering, laughing, and gossiping, students made progress and completed projects on schedule. Much of the chatter centered around the students' work both seriously helping and seriously not helping. Some of the projects observed in this study were wooden puzzles, illustrated storybooks, woodblock prints, cardboard sculptures, watercolor paintings, posters, stencil calendars, and pencil drawings of live models (fellow students) in action poses.

Calligraphy had the most standard pattern of instruction wherever I observed. One of the six required periods of Japanese each week is supposed to be calligraphy.[2] In my observations, teachers did calligraphy two or three times per month. Since stroke order, form, and balance are essential to paint the perfect character, teachers gave a brief description of the stroke order, demonstrating on the board in front, and mentioned techniques and particularly troublesome areas. Then students practiced on their own at their seats. Each student had his or her own kit complete with the necessary materials. Due to the nature of the activity and the

concentration needed for calligraphy, student talk and wandering are not encouraged. Because students use every available counter and floor space to spread out newspaper for drying their calligraphy, wandering is nearly impossible anyway. In a relatively quiet atmosphere, practice consisted of writing the same character over and over until students satisfactorily produced the character they wanted to show the teacher for correction and feedback. Hushed conversation usually involved one- or two-word comments about one's own or a neighbor's work. The goal was to produce three nice characters on rice paper to be approved by the teacher. Teachers sit in front and students bring their work to the teachers, who have a special orange ink to draw over student characters (black ink) to show them better form, balance, and spacing. Students often ask friends' advice for selecting the calligraphy to show the teacher.

The textbook shows the ideal character and step-by-step process for writing it. The front page of the textbook has a photo of a student sitting in the proper posture holding the brush correctly—essential elements in the art of calligraphy. Form, symmetry, balance, rhythm, and order work together with heart, body, mind, and spirit to effect the art. However, students actually find their strokes do not match those in their minds or in their textbooks. They find calligraphy frustrating and disappointing until —"Aha!"—the character they were striving for appears on their rice paper. Some craft fat, bold characters, whereas others produce frail, less confident ones. Teachers praise some for their "healthy" (*genki*) characters and admire others for the consummate whole: they hold up the character, look at it, and say, "superb" (*subarashii*), "pretty" (*kiree*), or "how skillful" (*umai*).

Finally, morals education has a textbook, but I never observed any teacher using it. Instead, Mr. Ito told many stories with clear values of interdependence, cooperation, and admirable character traits, such as

perseverance, honesty, and honoring one's parents. Some centered around the meaning of holidays and other traditions. He also spent several morals education class periods devoted to poetry study and choral singing. The content and background explanation of these poems and songs reinforced traditional Japanese culture. Choral singing was a means of developing the students' hearts and broadening their spiritual self through togetherness and sharing one voice, according to Mr. Ito. Mr. Seki also did not use the textbook, but he had handouts (like the one on friendship described in Chapter 4), and his students watched the educational television program for morals classes. The program usually consisted of students of the same grade level involved in a predicament—for example, a group of boys picking on another one, who then wrecks some school property, or the class trying to earn enough money for a project and not meeting its goal because some students did not follow through. Class discussion afterward centered on the resolution of the conflict and how students felt about the way they handled themselves. Reflection occurred orally and sometimes in writing.

Given Japans advanced growth in the electronics industry, surprisingly very little use of technology occurred in elementary school classrooms. Teachers differed in their use of NHK (Japanese educational television) broadcast shows. The observed Mori teachers never used the television, except occasionally to play videotapes of school events during student lunch hours. Umi teachers used the NHK-produced morals education programs and social studies and science broadcasts specially designed to supplement the textbook readings. Neither Mr. Seki nor Mr. Ito used slides or movies during the observation period. And there were no computers in classrooms. In fact, only the accounting and office staff used computers; everyone else did work by hand. I observed one Umi teacher use an overhead projector, and the only other equipment regularly used was the

tape recorder for music and for physical education dance and movement exercises.

Besides possible economic limitations, this lack of technology use also reflects a cultural and philosophical value placed on handmade items, direct experience, and experiencing with one's whole body (*taiken*) to learn and to remember. Moreover, the basic element of the Japanese language, *kanji*, must be written over and over to truly incorporate and remember, even though nowadays a computer can produce it with one push of a button. Another cultural value prizes the personal touch, face-to-face contact, and interpersonal relations. Knowledge gained from peers and from learning to work together is best provided at school, whereas students can learn from and about computers and television in other settings. Movements exist that try to incorporate more learning technologies, especially computers, into classrooms, but I do not know how successful they are (Miyashita 1994).

6.2d Summary

Teachers observed at Umi and Mori varied less in the generalized instructional formats discussed in this section than they did in the act of effecting the instructional process itself. Thus the main teacher sphere of instruction was more similar than the kinds of peer subspheres and teacher-student individual and group subspheres of instruction that grew in interaction with the main melody. The timing and kinds of questions used to stimulate students' thinking and their style of interaction created different environments. In each teaching-learning moment, the kinds and frequency of feedback and assessment differed.

The overall achievement level in academic subjects (Japanese, mathematics, science, and social studies) was higher at Umi. Besides peer pressure and assistance, a more significant contributing factor may have been outside-school study time rather than in-school practices and teaching

methods. Other than the number of tests administered, the main difference between Mr. Seki's and Mr. Ito's subject matter instruction was stylistic. Mr. Ito was more lively and interactive in eliciting student responses and in allowing for between-student consultation. Mr. Seki's style prompted a more subdued class atmosphere and less between-student interaction. Use of non-subject matter scheduled time differed greatly, with Mr. Ito spending more time in athletic, artistic, and musical activities, and his students performed better in these subject areas. Mr. Seki gave more written assignments, spent one period a week in individual library reading time, and assigned slightly more homework, and his students performed better on tests and on written work. However, no cause-effect assertions are justified. The effects of these differences on the academic achievement levels are impossible to judge on the basis of this study.

One major difference in instructional patterns occurred in the degree of peer assistance. In the observed Japanese classrooms, the teaching-learning processes were more variable in the ways students interacted with the teacher spheres and generated their own spheres of instruction. The nature of interpersonal relations in each classroom determined the degree of cooperative teaching-learning interactions and the amount and kinds of subspheres of instruction. Although more Mori students helped each other freely and achievement may have been bolstered for the majority of individuals within the classroom, achievement is limited to the range of what they know. On the other hand, with so much additional outside study, less spheres and less equitable spheres of instruction exist in Umi classrooms, but certain students have higher overall achievement levels, especially in academic subjects. The quality and range of their conversations and teaching-learning assistance is greater for those students. Several Umi parents reported that the high quality of Umi's student body

was one aspect that made Umi a “good school.” They felt that being surrounded by students who were serious and diligent in their studies was a good influence on their own child.

Even though some standard instructional patterns can be identified, Mr. Seki’s instructional challenge is quite different than that for Mr. Ito. What does Mr. Seki do with 60 to 90% of his students who have learned the material before he even presents it, compared with Mr. Ito, who is virtually assured that nearly 100% of his students have not learned the material, and several may still not understand the prerequisite material they studied in previous grades. For example, how can students compute complex fractions if they still have trouble with division? One wonders what “bad” teachers look like with Umi students or what Umi student performance would be like with or without teachers. And conversely, one wonders what Mr. Ito’s students would be like without the cooperative sense of community and without the dedication and expertise of a teacher like Mr. Ito.

6.3 Feedback and Evaluation Mechanisms

The density of the curriculum, large class size, and a full calendar of activities prevent teachers from providing much individualized feedback or assessment, except for occasional comments during class, notebook grading, tests, and report cards. Understandably, those who ask the teacher more questions, those who raise their hands, and those who go up to the teacher’s desk receive more individual feedback. Not deliberately, those who sit in front, those who yell more loudly, and those who speak out of turn receive more attention. The main means for teachers to provide individual feedback were walking up and down aisles during individual or small-group work, sitting at their desks and having students bring work for their approval, and writing comments on homework, grades, and diaries.

Group feedback is a common kind of feedback in terms of generalized praise and reprimands. Often teachers refer to a group number (e.g., *han* #1, *han* #2) as being too noisy, not ready, or conversely, doing well. Praise is frequently used as a means to secure compliance: both by setting expectations in advance ("You were so good on the bus last trip") and by describing desired behavior when facing a less-than-desired reality ("Everyone is standing so straight today"). Individual praise in public was common, especially after a good answer, performance, or effort, but individual reprimand in public was rare. Teachers reserved individual reprimands for face-to-face private times. Instead, group reprimands in public were more common. While most students knew who the culprits were, all shared responsibility for improving. More frequent individual feedback comes from peers: both positive and negative, specific and general. The most heartwarming kind is spontaneous applause and praise for someone who has done very well, has tried very hard, or has finally succeeded after several previously failed attempts.

Often, teachers earned their authority and garnered control more through repeated patience than with repeated punishment. Reprimands and angry words work against the purposes of long-term constructive behavior change. As one teacher explained, "Punishing a child pushes him farther away. If you want to get him to work with you, you must open your heart and bring him in." Instead, well-placed praise is their most powerful tool. Teachers also rely on peer pressure. Surprisingly few punishments were doled out besides teacher disappointment, frequent grumblings, and occasional harsh words. Just as importantly, few students receive special attention or rewards for excellent performance. I informally distributed a questionnaire asking students to list the kinds of rewards and punishments they received at school or from parents, and no students listed anything for

punishments. The few rewards listed were praise and good grades. In their egalitarian and delegated decision making, in their reliance on tolerance and patience rather than on rewards and punishments, and in their sensitive negotiation of interpersonal relations, teachers serve as role models for students, who must handle similar situations among themselves.

Because of diverse grouping patterns and social cohesion priorities, feedback is ongoing and from multiple sources in the Japanese classroom. Based on different norms for classroom participation, the Japanese case may shed light on new or refined parameters for U.S. research regarding feedback and evaluation mechanisms. For example, Bossert (1979) found that traditional whole-group teaching methods are associated with a competitive public form of evaluation that enables students to hierarchically rank each other by academic achievement. These students tend to form more rigid friendship groupings, whereas students in classes using more multitask small-group work exhibit more fluid friendship patterns and more on-task behavior. He attributes the latter phenomena to less public evaluation and ranking systems and to increased opportunities for participation and individualized feedback. Schofield and Sagar (1979) also found that emphasis on ability grouping fosters use of academic performance as a primary means for students to evaluate each other and often results in segregated student groupings.

The Japanese case reveals that these dimensions are not so simple. Although public forms of evaluation may induce hierarchical rankings that create rigid friendship groupings, the difference is not necessarily due to whole-group as opposed to small-group work. Given different norms that allow for peer consultation during whole-group modes or that purposefully nurture fluid friendship groupings, both teaching methods may work toward positive social relations and increased feedback. Moreover, if varied

activities and subject matters are valued, even with public evaluation mechanisms, singular hierarchical rankings may not result. While ability grouping may increase segregated groupings, Umi also shows that multiability grouping is not a sufficient condition for preventing segregated peer groupings. When other status variables are at work, without attempts to mitigate those variables, social groupings may remain segregated. Cohen (1982) found the same problem with status variables in her research in interracial interactions in the United States.

According to U.S. research, a significant by-product of small-group work is increased participation opportunities for students who tend to retreat from whole-group participation and for linguistic minority students who have more chances to practice language (Cohen & Intili, 1981). Also, teachers spend less time on control and discipline issues, since more students are engaged and less interruption is possible than with large-group instruction.

Again, the Japanese case reveals that given different norms and mechanisms for control, small-group versus whole-group work may not be the primary distinctions; rather participation options and engagement modes may be more promising. The operational definition of interruption is relative. Less interruptions and less time spent on control and discipline in Japanese classrooms result from different supervision mechanisms and a higher tolerance for noise, not from the type of group mode. In this way, the notion of spheres of instruction may be more relevant. Some U.S. teachers probably control classrooms such that whole-group versus small-group distinctions are valid, whereas other U.S. teachers probably allow more latitude for peer consultation even during whole-group modes, similar to the Japanese. Detailing the spheres of instruction is possible in both kinds of classrooms: the former would have fewer and more distinct spheres of instruction, whereas the latter would have more spheres, some simultaneous

and interacting. The latter classroom needs the flexibility and variability that the notion of spheres of instruction provides to be able to capture the more fluid conversation patterns. The distinctions between whole-group and small-group modes maybe less informative than detailing the spheres of instruction and how they influence student engagement and interruption.

Other U.S. research has shown that the nature of the learning task is important. Aaronson and colleagues (1978) report the positive effects of task interdependence on intergroup relations. Slavin (1983) also shows that cooperative reward structures improve student relations. Both studies reveal that cooperation and face-to-face interaction improve interracial relations and can increase student friendliness. Alongside development of trusting relations and small-group work, cooperative norms and tasks that increase student interdependence can enhance participation and opportunities for successful completion of tasks. The Japanese case strongly supports these findings, especially regarding interdependence and cooperative reward structures, but constant attention to status variables and developing equitable trusting relations is paramount. The Japanese case also reveals how the same interdependence, cooperation, and face-to-face interaction are possible in a whole-group mode with large class sizes.

The nature of teacher evaluation and feedback influences student inclusion or exclusion in the learning dialogue. This area is more problematic to assess in the Japanese case, since so much feedback is from peers rather than teachers. Natriello and Dornbusch (1984) identify six necessary conditions for effective evaluations. In order to increase student achievement and effort, the evaluation must be perceived as (1) central, (2) influential, (3) soundly based, (4) reliable, (5) reliably interpreted, and (6) frequent and challenging to students (pp. 5–12). Oren (1980) found that “varied and specific feedback” had positive effects on the academic self-

image of minority students and lessened the amount of low-status behavior, whereas reliance on just marking and grading without any feedback aggravated status effects.

Japanese students do receive varied and specific feedback, but more often from other students and in group modes, while their individual feedback from the teacher largely consists of marks and grades. A more systematic comparative study of these aspects would be interesting. How much more (or less) would Japanese students accomplish if they received more individual attention and feedback from teachers but less from peers? This study did not systematically investigate the perception of feedback and its impact on achievement and effort. Teacher feedback is prized by Japanese students, and on an individual basis students reported that the teachers praise affected their efforts and achievement, but on the whole, effort seemed less linked to individual feedback from teachers and more to the quality of social relations, group feedback, and peer feedback.

Rosenholtz and Wilson (1980) found more uniform agreement between students on academic rankings in classrooms dominated by whole-group instructional methods. Students with high reading ability dominated learning activities, especially when teachers depended on a limited array of activities in their instructional methods. Again, this study indicates that the whole-group instructional method was a less strong determinant of class ranking than the norms that accompany whole-group methods. Allowing for consultation and group participation modes within whole-group instruction and minimizing public evaluation mechanisms can counteract obvious class rankings in the Japanese case. Umi students tended to name the same few students as “smart,” whereas Mori students had little agreement. Yet both classrooms used whole-group methods for much classroom instruction. Rather than whole-group methods, perhaps a higher value placed on social

cohesion and on a variety of learning activities prevents domination by students with a certain type of cognitive skill (such as reading). Feedback in a wide array of intellectual and representational forms seems to warrant attention for diversifying academic ranking. More careful study of Japanese settings is necessary to confirm these speculations.

Individual and group reflection times (*hansei*, Section 6.5b) are the most interesting and most common forms of feedback and evaluation, and these forms receive little attention in the United States. Japanese teachers rely more heavily on reflection as a means of self-assessment and feedback. As an individual process, students write a self-assessment and other reflections first, then the teacher reads and comments on the observations and assessment. As a group process, reflection is done orally in a small- or whole-group discussion mode. Interestingly, for teachers and students, reflection is conducted as a process of mutual construction of feedback assessment.

Differences in the types of feedback and evaluation mechanisms result from and support different mechanisms of authority and control in the observed classrooms. The next section describes the classroom realities of authority and control, then subsequently analyzes some of the mechanisms underlying the observed realities.

6.4 Authority and Control

6.4a Authority and Control in Action: Self- and Peer Supervision

As soon as the teacher or student says, “Class is over,” students pop out of their seats yelling, laughing, kicking, hitting each other, wrestling on the floor, throwing things, racing and chasing each other, but angry disputes rarely erupt for more than a quick glare or an extra hard kick or punch in return. They are just having fun. A by-product of the fact that teachers

rarely monitor such behavior is that students rarely go to teachers to solve such disputes. The few “tattle-tale” cases were met with indifference by the teacher or with a quick but effective glance or grumble. Students settle most matters themselves; ongoing dispute negotiation is an integral part of mutual teaching-learning.

Classroom instruction time is preserved for instruction. School rules assume different expressive meaning in each classroom depending on their manner of enforcement. Students naturally forget; students naturally want to test the bounds; some are naturally mischievous; and others naturally want to do less. Teachers simply ignore low levels of undesirable behavior and speech and continue teaching during subject matter instruction in order to stay on schedule and to prevent instruction from becoming tedious. One rationale for ignoring the noise is that disruptive behavior by a few should not interfere with the majority who are listening. And those who cannot hear must assume responsibility to deal with the disruptive behavior of their friends: peer supervision.

Class meeting times are the primary mechanism for dealing with classroom organization and management concerns, but teachers also alter the subject matter schedule in order to focus on interpersonal relations and self-development when they feel classroom relations or student values are weak or need boosting. Rather than disrupt instruction in progress, they delay beginning subject matter instruction (especially first period), or they finish instruction early to incorporate such discussions (usually 5 to 15 minutes). Discussions often involve reflection time in which students are asked to set goals and assess their behavior and attitudes either orally or in writing (see Section 6.5b). Mr. Ito told stories with moral endings or gave examples of famous people who exhibited the desired character traits to guide their thinking. Other times may be “rewards,” such as playing group

games, for having performed well or having met goals for some event. Again, these activities serve to build social cohesion and to encourage student involvement, motivation, and concentration.

Placing a value on social relations, peer supervision, and mutual assistance inescapably invites greater noise and movement levels. In an interesting way, noise and silence are complementary partners of the same class management process. During class time, the amount of permissible murmuring, talking, and moving bodies without teacher intervention is surprising to an American observer. Yet it is not fully unregulated. A teacher's most powerful tool is silence. If a teacher stops talking for a while and just stands, students notice immediately. The most common way for teachers to secure classroom attention was to stand silently in front, waiting and watching. They waited silently until students noticed and quieted each other, no matter how long it took. Surprisingly, the process seldom took longer than a minute, though it seemed much longer.

Such warnings produce just a momentary lull, and silence rarely lasts long. Still, the noise level and movement do not translate into completely inattentive behavior either. In fact, another striking feature is the degree of attentive behavior during class times. Most murmurs are students' spontaneous reactions to the lesson, or elaborating on and questioning each other about what the teacher means. Although the talk is constant across 40 bodies, it is only instantaneous for most individuals. When students do not hear the teacher's instructions (and yell, "What page? What page?"), the teacher merely continues the presentation, and eventually (through the guidance of their peers) all the students are following along. It only takes a minute, but it is a rumbling minute.

In order to allow for peer supervision, teachers must be patient and tolerate a higher level of noise and movement to allow the mechanisms to

take hold. Students admonish their neighbors, straighten out their textbooks, help them find an answer, and warn them that the teacher is getting angry. If trouble persists, a teacher comments that “some people” are not listening but does not single anyone out. Sometimes an angry voice or a stern look controls rising levels of mayhem, and as a last resort, the teacher will mention names. Repeat offenders are dealt with after class, usually in a strict, reasoned conversation.

During break times, behaviors that would immediately evoke reprimands and punishments in most U.S. schools barely drew attention in these schools: one student dragging another by his feet from one classroom to another; several students piled up on the floor laughing and wrestling; piggyback rides through the halls; and running by the principal’s office making faces and banging on the door.

When asked about these “oversights,” several different explanations were offered. Most centered on the fact that with young children such noise and behaviors were to be expected and that attempting to control them 100% of the time would waste too much time and energy. A healthy, motivated, excited child is not quiet and motionless, especially when 40 to 45 are grouped together with one adult. Teachers are realistic. They expect elementary-age student conversations and behaviors to weave in and out of appropriate and inappropriate forms, from serious and relevant speech to fun and irrelevant musings and back again.

As a result, instead of demanding good behavior at all times, teachers are careful to exact such behavior only at critical times. One teacher likened the process to a dialectic yin-yang principle: in order to induce more concentration and diligent behavior during class, one must allow the noise and rowdiness to escape during breaks and transition times. Lastly, teachers felt the noise, laughter, and rowdiness were positive signs of togetherness,

enjoying school, and being alive and involved. They made a clear distinction between positive and negative noise, motivational versus detrimental rowdiness. Most of the mayhem I observed definitely fit into the category of fun, friendship, belongingness, and positive albeit deafening enjoyment. Control is set within a different context: delegated authority but not relinquished control.

Successful peer supervision depends in large part on self-supervision or self-discipline (*shitsuke*).[3] These areas overlap with home responsibilities, and both institutions need to help each other in developing these traits. Self-discipline is cultivated by neatness, cleanliness, accurate organization of time and possessions, attention to detail, respect for others, and thorough follow-through. Part of the definition of self includes role perfection, diligence, commitment, and perseverance. Without explicit instruction, many ways of behaving are absorbed. For instance, because everyone else neatly returns items to their proper place, picks up dropped items no matter whose they are, and straightens out areas for the public good, one feels obliged to do the same. I was surprised to find myself neatly putting my belongings back into proper places, piling my papers in an orderly stack, carrying pens and pencils in a pencil case, wiping off drops of water or any bit of dirt that dropped on my bag, and folding my handkerchief squarely, matching the edges carefully, before returning it to its proper place. And I never even carried a handkerchief in the United States. Things I would sometimes ignore in the United States, I always did in Japan: it somehow felt dirty or sloppy not to do these things. I felt I would attract attention by not doing them, though nothing was ever said.

When enough people are doing the same things, words are not necessary to teach and learn. Absorbed traits and peer pressure are effective forms of authority and control.

6.4b Analysis: Mechanisms of Authority and Control

With or without their physical presence, teachers enjoy invisible authority —referring to the authority, respect, and control teachers secure implicitly or indirectly by virtue of practices that obviate the need to control and directly or explicitly exercise their authority. The success they achieve with invisible authority depends in part on their traditionally accorded authority. The explicit hierarchical organization of schools and classrooms bestow teachers with structural authority. Authority by their presence was obvious judging by the slightly increased goofing off once they left. But even when absent, due to the built- in webs of obligations, responsibilities, norms, procedures, and expectations, students could manage themselves.

This ability to work whether or not the teacher was around is ingrained in first graders. One first-grade teacher left his class purposefully for brief moments. Upon his return, I am sure he knew the students were running around, and students yelled, “Teacher’s coming! Teacher’s coming!” as he approached. He purposefully stood outside the door and waited until all the students returned to their seats, then he asked, “May I come in?” Then he either praised the students because he did not have to wait long, or he expressed disappointment for having had to stand out in the hall so long.

Invisible authority was crafted by other means: standardization, delegated authority, interdependence, engagement, and trusting relations. Standardized forms of behavior and procedures establish a consistency of expectations. Delegated authority and interdependence place students in charge of many discipline and control responsibilities, so peer pressure and supervision become powerful mechanisms for control. If students are engaged and motivated, they control themselves. Communication and work patterns also facilitate the process (see Section 6.5b).

The most effective form of control and authority is the strength of a caring relationship founded on trust and mutual respect. Respect included tolerating direct expression of positive and negative opinions, so refreshing and so aggravating a trait in young children, and tolerating a degree of disrespectful actions and antics. But the expression of opinions, risk taking, and letting students be themselves were ways for teachers and students to "make sense of each other."

McDermott (1977) explains that teachers and students must "make sense" of each other as a prerequisite to a successful learning dialogue. A key element in successfully negotiating this understanding is developing "trusting relations." He describes this understanding as one in which teachers and students "understand each other's behavior as directed to the best interests of what they are trying to do together and how they can hold each other accountable for any breach of the formulated consensus" (p. 199). In an important distinction, trust is not a property of an individual; rather it is a "product of the work people do to achieve trusting relations, given particular institutional contexts" (p. 199).

The Japanese case seems to be rich in the variety of ways trusting relations can be nurtured. Delegating authority contributes in major ways. Lewis (1989) reveals nice insights in her speculations on the "likely effects of peer versus adult enforcement of rules on children's internalization of rules and their attitudes toward authority" (p. 41). Interestingly, she observed the same pattern of delegation of authority to children in nursery schools. One observation is that "delegating authority to children enables teachers to make few behavioral demands on children" (p. 41), which then allows "the teacher to remain a benevolent figure to whom children have a strong, unconflicted positive attachment" (p. 41). She also suggests that peer criticism "poses less of a threat to the child's identity as a good child"

(p. 41) and that adult criticism would more likely “cause the child to feel like a bad child. The ‘good child’ identity may, in turn, be a critical determinant of the child’s subsequent willingness to obey rules” (p. 41).

My observations lend support to Lewis’s views. Teachers definitely separated the act from the person, meaning students were not seen as “bad”; rather they were seen as “good” students who had done “bad” things. As annoying as Koyama-kun’s behavior could be, Mr. Seki persisted in the belief that he had a good heart and just needed time to mature; and Mr. Seki was ever patient with Koyama-kun. Maintaining a positive self-image as a “good child” even though he or she may often do bad things seemed to work in the observed settings.

The teachers’ tendency to assess and understand the quality of students’ hearts, especially to recognize their basic goodness even if they regularly caused trouble, was commendable. Koyama-kun and the class bully at Mori, Kanda-kun, are good examples. Mr. Ito recognized Kanda-kun’s more aggressive nature. He was the biggest, strongest boy in the class, but Mr. Ito also explained that he had a tender, good heart underneath the rough facade. He worried more about Mita-kun, who he felt did not receive much attention from his parents. When teachers voiced apprehension about problem students or about students in general, a common reflection was wondering if parents spent enough time talking with their children each night to truly understand the children’s feelings and concerns.

Shimahara and Sakai discuss these values nicely in their depiction of ethnope-dagogy, the Japanese cultural theory of teaching. They elucidate the concept of *kizuna*, which fosters empathy and represents a “touching of the hearts.” Another Japanese teacher puts it this way (Shimahara & Sakai, 1995, p. 169):

> *Kizuna* is a primary condition for teaching and for children to learn from the teacher. If it is not developed, teaching becomes a matter of mechanical process. *Kizuna* means to me developing trust. Without it, discipline would not be effective and children would not listen to me. Teaching is based on the relationship of trust. Classroom management is impossible without trustful relationships.

Trusting relations are secured in an overall positive, emotionally safe environment. Less punishment, more praise, even more patience, and the teacher as a benevolent figure help to nurture this environment. Rather than yell at students for their misbehavior, teachers will calmly point out how the behavior inconvenienced others. In this case, empathy and being aware of their effect on others should bring students into line. With positive relations, the desire for inclusion becomes a powerful tool for soliciting individual initiative, responsibility, and cooperation. Eventually student behavior accommodates teacher and group wishes because students want to cooperate, not because of adult commands. Student voluntary compliance is the goal. Developing this internalized set of desires to cooperate and conform is a maturational process supported by cultivating the four Cs and by sensitive understanding of each student as an individual.

Happiness generated by respectful, trusting relations, not by yelling, punishment, or humiliation, seemed a natural part of classroom life. By the time teachers must rely on yelling and punishment to secure control or to define and exert their authority, they have lost the classroom management battle. In fact, Japanese teachers do not face classroom management as a battle nor do they envision it as an adversarial struggle between themselves and the students. Rather, classroom management is a shared concern: the teacher and students together as one classroom entity, not as opposing forces. Relying on student-elected leaders and delegating authority that rotates equitably to all students helps to reduce the power struggle between teachers and students because the teacher remains a benevolent figure.

Teachers extract themselves from some decision making, letting the students settle matters among themselves—for example, deciding how to choose teams, how to celebrate an occasion, how to solve problems and issues, or how to distribute work assignments.

Also, simply ignoring many broken rules results in less behavioral demands and avoids teacher-student battles. Student personality, degree and type of interruption, and maturity factor into a teacher's handling of each situation. Some of the most disruptive students I observed were young for their age. They meant well but just could not keep quiet or sit still. Those cases were met with a shake of the head and a smile or with complete indifference. Direct statements, scolding, and criticism were reserved for private talks, and these seemed rare. The more common forms of control depended on implicit messages sent in the form of well-placed praise: before an event to set expectations, or at the moment teachers sense students are going astray, or praising those students who exhibit the desired behavior.

But at the same time, clear, specific, and abundant behavioral expectations exist. Teachers often use indirect mechanisms to internalize control, just like the first-grade teacher waiting until students seated themselves before asking, "May I come in?" In another example, one home economics teacher, angry at the lack of order (boys were running around, goofing off), held up a disheveled box of yarn and explained how long it had taken her to organize the box. She never yelled, did not try to find the culprits, and just repeatedly explained that such behavior "injured her heart." No punishments were mentioned. She simply placed the box at the front of the room and left. The guilty parties, urged by a few friends, eventually went up to straighten the yarn but quickly left to goof off again.

With the job unfinished, other students noticed, complained, yet grudgingly straightened the box out before the teacher returned.

Teachers draw attention to specific misbehaviors and express disappointment, but names deliberately remain unsaid. Nothing more needs to be said. Most of the time, students and teachers know who the guilty parties are. Importantly, the behavior, not the child, is seen as bad, and the guilty parties have a chance to redeem themselves and save face. Whether or not students really make amends, responsibility is left with them to take the initiative: implicit mechanisms for internalized control. Teachers may criticize directly, the most embarrassing form of censure, but more frequently they just mention the problem, leaving it up to students to know who has to take action: “Some people are still not listening,” or “Everyone has not turned in their notebooks.” Often, disappointment or approval needs no words. Students and teachers read each other’s eyes, face, or body language.

Rather than depending on external forms of control, teachers preferred a more subtle, internal approach: developing the proper attitude toward classroom life and studies. The proper attitude is one that is motivated, containing the will to learn, to cooperate, and to help others for the pleasure of inclusion. When students can think together, they can act together. Togetherness fosters more efforts to help and to study. Heartfelt group membership is a powerful motivating force in Japanese classroom life. The more students that teachers can engage and motivate, the less behavior demands and problems they must face. As Mr. Ito said, if teachers make studies interesting to students, they do not have to worry about class management.

Erickson (1984) highlights three ways that social relations can directly affect the definition of learning tasks, which in turn determine whether

students will truly display their competencies or productively engage in learning activities. First, there is scaffolding (Wertsch, 1985, 1998)—that is, a process of negotiations between teachers and students. In constructing their relations, the range of students' rights for asking for assistance is tacitly approved. The extreme form of absence of scaffolding occurs in standardized testing where neither the teacher nor the student has the opportunity to negotiate the task. Second, when some students are favored more than others, active nonlearning may result as a symbol of political resistance on the part of students who feel discriminated against. Third, the micropolitics of the classroom in terms of power relations must be assessed relative to their impact on student access to, participation in, and successful completion of learning activities.

Based on Japanese teachers' handling of decision making and equitable distribution of responsibilities, micropolitics of the classroom and political resistance are minimized. Teachers purposefully avoid situations where teacher favoritism may be deduced, favoring decision by lot, by rotation, or by students themselves. The emphasis on group cohesion also works against such resistance. While negotiating is an inescapable part of life with students, they clearly know the boundaries, and teachers oblige frequently enough to maintain relations. Negotiations are done with a sense of humor and caring, resulting in cheers or groans, with the teacher chuckling. Moreover, along with delegation of duties and conflict resolution, negotiations between peers are more salient than that between students and teachers.

Though teachers are respected, it is not necessarily shown in ways Americans would expect. For instance, at break times, 10 to 15 students crowded around the teacher's desk, especially if he was grading tests or if they were curious about what he was doing. They climbed on his back,

leaned all over his desk, sat on each other, and crowded so close that they became one mass pushing against the teacher. Sometimes students rummaged through the teacher's desk drawers and in his bag, making comments about the things they found. Since Mr. Ito often smoked a cigarette during break time and several girls did not like the smoke, they waved their hands in front of their faces and remarked how smoking was bad for his health and for their noses. Other times I saw students hit teachers—playfully and laughing but a slap nonetheless.

The teachers' responses were often the same feigned indifference or a groan at best, sometimes playful jabs in return; they also engaged in playful conversation. And soon the students were off and running into other play. Students at Umi did not rummage through Mr. Seki's things, but they read whatever lay on his desk, and both classes had their share of smart alecks. These comments or actions did not seem to phase the teachers, and they did not interpret these behaviors as completely disrespectful. In general, teachers do comment about the decline of respect and the lack of cooperation between parents and teachers. They bemoan the lack of unquestioned authority teachers once had and that parents more often side with their children rather than with the teachers and want only what is best for their child regardless of what is best for other children. However, the tolerance for the obnoxious comments and behaviors reflects the existence of an acceptable range of children's playfulness and a recognition of the respect teachers actually enjoy when they truly need students' cooperation and attentive listening capacities.

6.5 Five Essential Elements: Facilitating Community, Enabling Connectedness

The mechanisms for authority and control and for feedback and evaluation do not work without considerable support from other areas. Japanese

students and teachers effect smooth working operations and effective teaching-learning spheres due to five elements besides diversity of social forms: (1) variety in intellectual and representational forms, (2) communication and work patterns, (3) congruence between adult world and student world, (4) norms, and (5) cultural features.

6.5a Variety in Intellectual and Representational Forms

Diversity in intellectual and representational forms increases the number of spheres of instruction available to students and expands the avenues for mutual participation. Both facets help to avert discipline and control problems by enhancing opportunities to tap student interests and to ensure successful completion of some educational activities for everyone. Cultivating and valuing mixed sensory modes and competencies broadens student understanding and growth and helps to prevent a singular standard for judging ability and individual worth within classrooms. Equity concerns are served by maximizing the number of spheres, participation opportunities, and kinds of growth in sensory and competency modes for the most students.

Diversity of forms within subject matter studies has been discussed in previous chapters: Tables 6.1 and 6.2 list some of the activities observed during this study. Be mindful that these are not meant to be simple checklists. Separating activities into the different categories represents artificial distinctions in many cases. The interaction and combination of areas must be appreciated, as well as their repeated performance over time, couched by values of developing personhood and ever-present attention to feelings.

Table 6.1 Intellectual Forms in the Observed Settings

a. Linguistic

calligraphy (spatial, logical/math, bodily-kinesthetic)
songs (musical, bodily-kinesthetic, linguistic)
Japanese (written and oral, spatial)
student broadcasts, plays, ceremonies, *yobikake* (see p. 95)
spheres of instruction

b. Musical

singing (in homeroom, music class, special events, ceremonies)
rhythms, physical education (bodily-kinesthetic)
play musical instruments
clubs
vehicle for friendship, fun (during field trips, cleaning, break times)
incorporated in various activities and events

c. Bodily-kinesthetic

posture, lineup (cultural)
physical education—variety of skills, swimming, mats, games, track
hiking/overnight trips
sports day, ceremonies, extracurricular activities
plays
group work

d. Spatial

calligraphy, *kanji*
school procedures—desk setup, cleaning, place for everything, lineup
physical education
math/*origami*, other crafts; social studies: murals/newspapers
note taking

science—experiments

with limited classroom space, need keen sense of space (cultural factor)

cleaning

art class—designing, building

e. Logical-mathematical

subject matters: homework, class discussions, lectures, note taking, tests

student councils, monitor duties, student planning of activities

reflection

extracurricular activities

f. Personal

han work

goals of the week, cleaning

classroom norms: people interactions, social relations are central

social cohesion, interpersonal relations: lunch, cleaning, activities

big brother/sister (first-sixth graders)

interdependence in events (sports teams, cultural festivals, ceremonies)

moral education

emotion, cognition, whole person

spheres of instruction

reflection

Table 6.2 Representational Forms in the Observed Settings

a. Words

all subject matters: notes, textbooks, lectures, discussions—discursive singing (history, international, reading music, singing, playing) reciting—*haiku*, *tanka* (poetry), broadcasts, ceremonies, assemblies student planning, newspapers, drawing comics, club activities

b. Music

play different instruments: recorder, piano, harmonica
ceremonies: sports day, graduation, school assembly
theater productions and music festivals (2 of every 3 years)
science experiment on sound
singing as a vehicle for community building, sharing experience
club activities
poetry recitation

c. Dance

sports
physical education, field trips, camping/overnights
recess, between-class breaks
sports days, swimming races, track and field
club activities

d. Arts and crafts

art
combined with math/social studies/science note taking, experiment record
student newspapers, poster making
art exhibit (every 3 years)

home economics
clubs, student councils (some school assemblies)
special events (sports day)
illustrate poetry

e. Numbers, words
all subjects
extracurricular activities

f. People interactions
han work—subject matter, cleaning, lunch
group responsibilities: monitors, student council
constant during class
extracurricular activities
moral education
conflict resolution
class meetings
group assessment and reflection

Of particular note is the substantial difference in form between written English and Japanese. Written Japanese language, especially in the art of calligraphy, displays intellectual and representational diversity in itself. I wonder what influence this aspect of the two languages has on the observed pedagogical practices and ways of thinking.

Writing Japanese characters is at once a cognitive, an aesthetic, and a kinesthetic act heavily dependent on heightened spatial awareness. In intellectual forms terminology, written Japanese contains linguistic, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, and even musical (rhythmic) elements. To write characters (especially for calligraphy), stroke order,

form, angles, space, rhythm, and balance are critical. Physical and mental contemplation and focused concentration are required. Ideally, form, rhythm, balance, focused concentration, and an aesthetic sense combine to find their reality on the page during calligraphy practice. Practice is necessary because no mistakes are allowed. Strokes cannot be erased or touched up. One's physical and mental capacities focus on the instantaneous moment of the brush stroking the page to craft the precise yet artful line form. Although adults do not pay careful attention to these aspects in their daily writing, elementary students must be more attentive, just as U.S. elementary students must worry more about penmanship.

Diversity occurs in the mix of sensory modes tapped as well as in the integration of subject matter studies. I observed several math lessons supplemented by arts and crafts activities (e.g., *origami* [Japanese paper folding] or symmetry drawings), or social studies combined with Japanese and art (e.g., studying poetry from the same historical period, illustrating cards to quiz fellow students on regional agricultural products).

The most outstanding and unusual studies were observed in a Nagano school specially designated to develop model lessons for individualized instruction and for combining social studies and science into life studies—a proposed Ministry of Education reform at the time of this research. In five different classrooms, teachers and students bought animals to raise (e.g., chickens, pigs, and goats) or planted gardens (rice, Japanese turnips) to form the centerpiece of their life studies. Their animal or vegetable became the focal point for various language arts, music, art, science, social studies, and cultural activities. Students carefully documented each stage of growth, and caring for the animal or plant served as the springboard for student-initiated plans and hypotheses. Students problem-solved and experimented on their own.

For example, first graders were raising chickens. The floor was covered with plastic so that the chickens could freely enter and leave the classroom. The students planned and built houses and feeding trays for the chickens. I was amazed to see small groups of first graders wielding hammers and nails to build the structures, dig ditches, and care for the chickens. Some students built feeding trays suited to their height and realized they were too high for chickens, so they had to go back to the drawing board. When illness struck, they interviewed community doctors to find out what to do. When tragedy struck and some chickens died, they learned to deal with death and created a graveyard and conducted funeral rites. When several chicks were lost, students made posters and distributed them in the community. Another group produced a video to ask others to help find their lost chickens.

Commonly, once a teacher and his or her class selected an animal or plant as the focus of their study, they continued for 3 years. Another classroom decided their pig was lonely, bought another, and had a marriage ceremony. I arrived to see the invitations to the wedding that had been sent to each classroom in the school. And the pigs raised a family. Detailed drawings of the birth and growth process adorned the classroom walls. One second-grade class had been raising Japanese turnips since the first grade. They interviewed local farmers to decide the right soil mixture, called on plant specialists when plants became diseased, interviewed parents about recipes and various uses for turnips, and performed the appropriate rites and rituals to reap a successful harvest. They wrote songs and stories based on their projects and sang the songs at the annual music festival. Each student also selected an in-depth individual or small-group project to document the turnip study: one group was writing a play, another was writing books, and one girl had painted a beautiful scroll that spanned the entire gymnasium floor. It documented each stage of growth. Another group had mapped the

entire community, specially designating farmers who grew Japanese turnips, and had collected soil samples from each farm.

In addition to subject matter study, the variety of forms is reinforced through numerous avenues that are diverse in their own right, such as extracurricular activities, special events, monitor duties, and council duties. The frequency with which the forms are combined lends credence to the idea that perhaps a holistic interaction of forms is vital to the development of the whole person. After all, perception involves all the senses constantly working together in our moment-to-moment lives.

The sports day is a good example of the mixture of forms. It does not just consist of a series of athletic events performed on 1 day. Athletic events are mixed with artistic, musical, and dance elements. Upper-grade students also help run the event in addition to participating. The emcees and announcers are sixth graders, and fifth-sixth graders keep score and run the broadcast booth to play the music for various events. Leadership skills, organizational skills, and subject matter studies are reinforced in multiple ways. For 2 months prior to the big day, music classes for fifth and sixth graders focus on their band skills, since they are the marching band that leads the student body onto the playground to begin the event. The opening ceremony is a mix of music, marching, and the symmetry of whole-group motion: musical, interpersonal, spatial, and kinesthetic awareness combined.

Interpersonal skills and community identity are reinforced in other ways: team spirit must be engendered to add to the fun. Some sixth graders are selected to be cheerleaders by classmates; they write cheers and practice routines with dance and athletic stunts to build vocal momentum for their team. One or two periods of subject matter study are lost so that the whole school can meet in their respective teams to practice their cheers. During the event itself, a combination of individual, small-group, whole-grade-

level, and whole-school events foster interpersonal and moral goals. The whole-grade-level activity is a cooperative event: a dance done to music, group gymnastics, or physical formations with props and costumes. Relays are often a clever combination of physical activity, humor, and sometimes art. As one example, each student in the relay ran to the other end of the field and added one decoration to a parade float (*mikoshi*). By the time the relays were done, first-through third-place finishers earned points for their team, but more importantly, each relay had fully decorated a parade float, and the whole school could join to carry the floats on their shoulders and march around the playground.

Artistic skills contribute other vital dimensions: the day cannot occur without festive decorations. As a cooperative art project, students created larger-than-life-sized cartoon character billboards with slogans urging their team to do its best. Flags or individual student artwork were strung along ropes and hung high over the playground to flutter above the activity. Props and other decorations for relays and dances enriched the day.

Similarly remarkable variety in forms were evident in cultural festivals (theater, music, and art). Theater and music days especially lend themselves to a mixture of forms, whereas the visual arts festival was an exhibit of student work, and projects displayed variety in media forms. For example, the fifth graders at Mori had made wooden puzzles and individual paintings with a bicycle theme along with a needlepoint project and cooperative group paintings of dragons. The former were part of their ongoing art studies, the needlepoint was a home economics project, and the small-group projects took up additional class time. For the latter, groups of four to six students worked together to paint on a 3 x 4-foot poster board. At the end of each painting session, students posted their work, and the whole group reflected on the projects to give advice on how to improve them. The results

were outstanding. The extra time required for the projects partially accounts for the facts that there were no tests and that the subject matter schedule was not followed during my first month of observations (November 1987).

Theater productions combined play- and songwriting, acting on stage, chorus singing, instrument playing, and scenery, costume, and prop making. Each grade level cooperates to put on one play, so a lot of subject matter time must be put aside to schedule practice time. Lively participation and well-rehearsed products were invariably evident.

At Mori, after-school time was often used to finish projects and practice for the big events, whereas after-school time was unavailable for most students at Umi because of *juku*. The loss was not only for *juku* students but even more so for non-*juku* students. They faced a possible triple loss: they did not benefit from *juku* nor did they benefit from extra practice at school, and they suffered a possible loss in self-image from the disadvantages.

Improving skills and appreciation of diverse intellectual and representational forms improves school participation, diversity in social forms, and eventual achievement in other ways. For example, as an expression of community and as a means of heart-to-heart connection, choral singing and poetry recitation share the characteristic of allowing "different individual voices to join together to become one." These are Mr. Ito's words to articulate an important goal observed in classrooms throughout Japan. As an observer, these opportunities also provided a vehicle for togetherness that extended into other areas. For instance, students sang and recited poems while they cleaned and while they walked to and from school or in the hallways; thus singing and poetry became vehicles for enjoyment as well. Besides a community-building and pleasure-sharing function, music served as an invaluable spiritual nest for some individuals. As one (low-achieving) student mentioned in her

interview, “I like singing because it calms my heart and I can concentrate better.”

For at least some teachers and students, varied intellectual and representational forms contribute to intellectual cognitive growth, if not directly, then surely indirectly. The forms also allow improved access to each other in a progressive cyclical pattern of growth. The integrated quality of results in the examples provided are not possible without integrated studies, especially to the moving and enviable quality observed. And the quality may not happen without high standards and expectations accompanied by sensitive instruction that makes such progress possible for the most students.

Integration is facilitated in multiple ways: integration of subject matters and activities, social integration, and personal integration. Basic skills in such diverse subject areas further expand integrated subject matter opportunities. Multiability, integrated social cohesion may be fostered with personal integration: whole-person growth and integrated sensory development for each student.

Perhaps the most memorable from an American standpoint is exposure to the empirically observable evidence that subjects like physical education, art, and music are not primarily ones of “talent” or “ability” in which poor performance may be easily dismissed. Instead, the Japanese case more strongly reveals that in these and other subject matter studies, learning and eventual achievement are an inseparable combination of natural tendencies (“abilities” maybe too confusing a term), nurturing (providing the right conditions and instruction), and effort. It was not coincidence that I observed a series of regular classroom teachers who managed to accomplish such results in music, art, physical education, and academic studies.

Integration between school processes and outside-school educational institutions and processes is significant. Several cultural factors undoubtedly support the variety of intellectual and representational forms that have a secure place in the core educational program in Japanese schools. Four in particular deserve mention. First, Japan is a reading public with a high regard for intellectual or educational pursuits. I was surprised to see students elect to stay inside and read during recess rather than play outside; others immediately began reading to productively use time while waiting or once they had completed an assigned task. Before the New Year break, Mr. Ito explained the value of reading and that he planned to read a book each day. The first thing he talked about after the vacation was how many books the students had read, mentioning that he had read all but one of his intended books.

Second, advertisements in newspapers and television programs contain much more educational information and informative charts and graphs than those in the United States. For example, a lettuce ad showed the difference between lettuce and cabbage flowers as the plant grows and listed a chart of the optimal temperatures for growing lettuce. I learned much by watching television even when I could not understand the verbal explanations. Travel shows that go to a region and explore how local crafts are meticulously produced, how culinary delights are artfully prepared, and how local farmers or fishermen conduct their trade were quite educational. Even when the television was on but I was not watching carefully, I would pick up new information.

Third, educational pursuits are not limited to reading and intellectual ones. Adults and children in Japan tend to have many more hobbies that they diligently pursue than Americans do. At Umi, I interviewed a Japanese girl who had gone to school through the fourth grade in California. When

asked how American and Japanese students differ, she replied that Japanese have more hobbies and like to read, create, and do more things. She commented that American children just go to the mall and watch television. I noticed many homemade items brought to school by children and received many different kinds of crafts as gifts from a number of students, friends, and parents during my research. The janitor at Umi was teaching himself English by listening to the public radio every morning; he also took tennis lessons. Many companies and schools have sports teams and other physical exercises to stimulate the mind and improve worker production and morale. Singing is a popular vehicle for togetherness and enjoyment. Piano lessons, choral groups, and simply taking one's palette, paints, and canvas outside to paint and draw are common pursuits. Another friend explained her surprise when a worker who came to fix the electricity in the gymnasium sat down and played a beautiful sonata on the piano. Surrounded by these kinds of influences in the media and in the community, teacher and student educational orientations are not surprising, including the appreciation for a mix of representational forms.

Finally, outside-school activities for students reveal a similar mix of variety in intellectual and representational forms. The cultural classes (*okeiko*) and sports clubs provide a broader range of experiences that reinforce multiple intellectual and representational forms, and many students participate in these types of activities. Abacus study is an interesting mix of logical-mathematical skill, spatial awareness, and bodily-kinesthetic involvement. The speed with which the practiced students can perform complex arithmetic calculations with the abacus and eventually just in their heads is amazing—comparable to using a calculator. Similarly, tea ceremony and calligraphy combine reflective concentration and intellectual understanding with aesthetic appreciation and spatial awareness. Martial

arts and traditional sports, such as *sumo* wrestling, also combine aesthetic, intellectual, spiritual, kinesthetic, and spatial awareness. These traditional arts are rich with rituals and meaning embedded in form, order, balance, and symmetry.

The question remains, however: How do the Japanese manage to accomplish so much with so many students in a limited amount of time? Besides standardization, identifiable communication and work patterns enable the classroom to progress together as a group and help to make transitions between activities a smooth, efficient process.

6.5b Communication and Work Patterns

Smooth and effective grouping patterns that enable the above variety of forms are possible only with complementary communication and work patterns: patterns of acting, speaking, organizing, planning, thinking, feeling, and knowing. One value in Japanese culture is the substantial role of form and order both in comportment and in organization of time, thoughts, materials, and the physical environment, including an emphasis on proper etiquette, personal habits, and rituals as a foundation for education. Repeated patterns of form and order improve self-discipline and comprise a vital framework through which eventual understanding is secured. Repetition of physical form and order cultivates understanding and an appreciation that induces mental form and order. Knowing the basic skills so thoroughly that they become second nature frees a persons capacity to create.

On a practical level, patterns that free the teacher from procedural matters are characterized by numerous preestablished proper forms of behavior and procedures that everyone, from the principal to the parents, is expected to follow; they are trained into students from the first day of first grade. Some are highly regulated, finely detailed ways to begin and end

each class period, to serve and clean up lunch, to write notes in notebooks, to dress for gym, to line up, to sit down, to pay attention, to prepare desks for study, to store things in lockers, and to project ones voice. Neatness, symmetry, and cleanliness are prized cultural, aesthetic values that support this form and order.

This type of consistency from year to year has four distinct advantages. First, increased procedural efficiency maximizes time spent on teaching content and on having fun in other ways. Second, teachers and students are freed from deciding those details, so creative energies may be directed elsewhere. Third, a long-term view for developing desired leadership, academic, social, and other skills is possible. Finally, integration across school sites and across other institutions is possible while regional differences may flourish. Teachers vary in their attention to these forms, but most Japanese know what they are supposed to be. Although some Japanese bemoan such regulation and resent pressures to conform, others regard the sense of form and order as an aesthetic value, and still others find the structure essential for developing self-discipline and a proper human being.

Uniform procedures and forms of behavior reflect outward appearance, not necessarily homogeneity or uniformity produced within the students' hearts and minds. In class, teachers encourage students to voice their own opinions, they ask for dissenting views, and students vote on possible answers. Students may practice identical skills until they have internalized a common form and learning process, but once learned, these basic skills actually enable them to become more adventuresome. Individuality was evident in their spin-off discussions, actions, and products. Avenues for individual expression may be more prescribed and structured, and hence, more limited in Japan, usually reserved for more private, familiar contexts,

but they do exist. I was impressed by the students' curiosity, initiative, and creative experiments during and after class.

Paradoxically, initially standardized and rote processes actually provide the foundation from which creativity and diversity may spring. This points to another valued pattern: repetition and drill. Both improve memory and skill building. In addition to the aesthetic of symmetry in patterns and in repeated actions, a value is placed on hard work, hardship, and suffering for character building and motivation. Taken together, Japanese recognize the value of repetition and drill for learning the basics.[4] Through repetition, one learns and demonstrates patience, dedication, and endurance—all highly prized character traits that are essential to learning. The point is to know something so well that it becomes automatic; one way to remember is with the mind but another more permanent way is with the body (*karada de oboeru*). Creativity springs out of the tension created by repetitive drill and hardship. And the ability to create comes from having mastered the basics.

Repeated practice in ways of thinking, organizing, and planning also sustain mutual teaching-learning processes. Emphasis on physical form and order is complemented by a kind of mental and spiritual form and order. Two especially important areas are goal setting and its essential complement, *hansei* (reflection). Each school has its already established overall goals: goals for each subject and school area, and goals for each grade level, each trimester, each month, and each week. While listening to the goals of the week and the administrator's speech that opens each school week on Monday morning, students are supposed to reflect on their own lives. Several times, teachers began first-period class late to have students reflect, either orally or in writing, about the speech or the goal for the week and how it relates to their lives. Significantly, teachers often began by

relating their own reflections, noting a shortcoming that they sought to rectify in themselves.

During reflection time, students are supposed to contemplate and evaluate their own participation. A student may praise his or her work, but it is much more acceptable to find something to criticize about one's performance and to offer suggestions for improvement. Peer reflection time is built into some *han* work; whole-group reflection may occur as a discussion method and feedback mechanism. For instance, after special events or after studying a certain topic or during work in progress, whole-group reflection or written reflection is common. Whether orally or in writing, reflection often serves as a mutual assessment mechanism between students and the teacher. Sometimes, Mr. Ito ended the day with students closing their eyes and thinking about the day as a whole, and what they could do tomorrow to improve upon the day's activities. Mr. Seki's students routinely did a quick reflection at the end of their cleaning time to review how they felt they did.

For students, written reflections are a means to summarize lessons, field trips, and special activities, assimilate learning activities, evaluate their participation and learning, and postulate the next problem for study or future learning goals. For teachers, written reflections are a means to gain a sense of student participation and learning, provide individual and group feedback, and maintain invisible authority.

Frequent goal setting at the beginning of each trimester or in preparation for a big event focuses student motivation and makes them set their own standards for judging future actions. After the event or at the end of a trimester, teachers may refer to the originally set goals and ask students to reflect again and evaluate their performances. Administrators, teachers, and parents do the same goal setting and reflection after events in their

respective groupings, and *hansei* is used in many forms throughout Japanese society. *Hansei* is important for providing a reflective moment to assess goal achievement as well as providing a means for self and group evaluation and soliciting meaningful feedback from all participants. Sometimes each person was expected to say something. If no one offered an opinion, the *han-cho* or facilitator called on people until everyone had spoken.

In their lifetime, especially in their schooling, students have ample practice in the art of *hansei*, a superb way to develop self-discipline, moral judgment, consideration of others, and the capacity to self-evaluate, especially in a constructively critical fashion toward self- and group improvement. This activity was frequent enough that by the sixth grade, students could sometimes be quite articulate about their performance.

Hansei is also a powerful mechanism of control—one way teachers enjoy invisible authority. Whether orally or in writing, teachers have the power to observe and respond to students' reflections. If teachers feel certain that students have not been reflective enough, they can make students rewrite or rethink their responses. Undoubtedly, students feel pressure not only to be honest in their reflections but also to conform to adult expectations. An important norm guiding the process is that people should be critical and emphasize their faults in an effort to strive for continual self-improvement rather than dwell on their positive successes and qualities.

The importance of *hansei* and goal setting points to a third profound pedagogical tool: absorption.[5] Absorption relies on a heightened awareness of innumerable nonverbal and implicit forms of communication that constitute the heart of many educational processes, cultural transmission, and social control in Japan. As a process, absorption encompasses a range of conscious and unconscious moments when we automatically act or know

what to do and what is going on without words having been uttered and often without even being able to describe precisely what led us to "know."

Absorption combines the acts of close scrutiny, diligent concentration, observant reflection, and attentive deliberation. Learning areas may be mundane, such as straightening one's desk or detecting what to do, or they may be more academic, such as discovering a science principle. John Singleton (1989) summed the expectations involved in absorption nicely when he remarked that a key feature of the apprenticeship process in a pottery village was to be able to "get the answer without asking" and "to watch without appearing to observe."[6]

The power of absorption lies in its constant underlying presence, not necessarily as a conscious act. It supports and permeates the readily recognizable ways to teach and learn, such as lecture, seat work, recitation, drills, consultation, and discussion. Clearly articulating the features of a setting that lead to an awareness may be impossible as it is an entirely sentient act, yet learning has occurred. People absorb a holistic combination of information through all the senses. Precisely because absorption operates on such indirect communications, sensations, and sensed pressures, it is a compelling way to accumulate knowledge, interpersonal skills, attitudes, values, motivation, and a will to conform. Consistency in form and order aids the absorption process.

Absorption rather than explicit instruction is an ideal form of learning. Some parents mentioned the importance of peer influences on their child's learning. The mutual teaching and learning comes from home, from adults, from peers, and from older and younger student relations. A strong current infused within classrooms and the surrounding culture, and therefore pertinent in the act of conducting this research, was being able to "get the answer without asking" and "to watch without appearing to observe."

Thus, communication with and especially without words are mutually reinforcing means of teaching-learning processes. Instruction is transmitted by reliance on role modeling and on direct experience in addition to the printed or spoken word. A cultural value in Japan is to recognize another person's feelings, to anticipate what needs to be done, and to do it without having to be told. This value creates a different form of educational processes working within classrooms, often making it a more efficient and smooth process. Transitions from one activity to another may be facilitated by a glance, a twitch, or a nudge. A teacher may just point or posture himself near some materials, and students ready themselves for action.

Being able to read others' bodies, faces, and eyes are just as important as being able to read books. As mentioned earlier, perhaps the most basic skill in Japanese society is the ability to understand and to construe meaning by sentient awareness without needing words. Subtlety, indirection, and "emphasis on that which is hidden and can only be intuited" are identified as expressions of cultural style by Befu (1971, p. 176). Learning in the traditional arts and crafts involves "as much through informal observation, intuitive understanding, and 'absorption' of the master's techniques as through formal, verbalized instruction" (p. 176). Befu explains that "this intuitive learning comes about only through a long and intimate relationship with the master" (p. 176). And "there is a good deal more emphasis placed on the nonverbal communication of emotion between mother and child in Japan, and this emphasis continues into adulthood" (p. 176). Sensitivity to feelings and interpersonal connectedness complement—perhaps take precedence—in the cognitive act.

At any rate, mechanisms of feedback and evaluation and of authority and control are intimately tied in with these communication and work patterns. A high level of physical intimacy and a sensitive attention to including

others as part of a group comprise essential elements in the nonverbal expression of assistance and inclusion. Instruction occurred with a tug of the elbow, a knowing finger pointing the way, and even a playful slap on the head. One heartwarming response, especially when students noticed another student had finally completed an activity with which he or she had been struggling, was sincere applause. At times the teacher noticed and told students to clap, but often students just spontaneously cheered and shared the pleasure of success. Mr. Ito could detect when problems had occurred at break time by students' eyes, especially if red from crying. He knew if some students had not gotten enough sleep because of a poor appetite. Sometimes he would begin class by having students do neck and shoulder exercises because they seemed tense. Other times, he had them sit on their desks in contemplative postures, close their eyes, turn their thoughts inward, and collect their thoughts as a means to calm them down from a physically active activity and to make the transition to social studies, Japanese, or math.

Students watch the teacher's actions; when the teacher picks something up from the floor, suddenly students look around their desks and clean up. Students who do not notice the teacher's actions can hardly miss the body movement generated by those who do notice and act. Students are aware of the teacher's comportment; they will admonish their neighbors or help them find an answer because of a disappointed pause. Most telling, they watch the teacher's eyes and warn neighbors that the teacher is getting angry. With this kind of assistance, teachers do not have to rely primarily on verbal control and can concentrate instead on verbal instruction.

Other norms foster considerate discussion and participation patterns. Carefully nurturing proper explicit verbal communication that attends to feelings and produces surface harmony is important to complement

nonverbal forms. Pressure rests on verbalizing the positive and constructive sides, leaving the negative sides and discord unsaid but implicitly understood. Students are encouraged to relate their ideas and opinions to the person who spoke before them; for instance, “I agree with this part, but…,” or “My idea is a little different “They must be aware of who has or has not had a turn and include their opinion or their participation without the other having to ask. A cultural value prizing humility and avoiding stealing the attention and credit aids the process. Listening (especially in the beginning stages of learning), not speaking, is a greater virtue. Mistakes are an inescapable part of the learning experience, and slight imperfections are natural. Pointing out one’s own weaknesses and laughing at one’s own foibles are healthy starting points for growth, not humiliating circumstances to hide. Boasting about one’s own strengths impedes the motivation to improve, whereas recognizing weaknesses optimizes possibilities for growth.

6.5c Congruence Between Adult World and Student World

Many of the previously discussed communication and work patterns mirror those found in the adult world. Congruence between in-school and outside-school practices and between school and classroom practices contributes significantly to the observed educational effectiveness. Basically, because many areas of Japanese society reinforce these expectations and demands placed on students, students naturally follow through on activities and reflect the communication and work patterns that they have unconsciously absorbed from adult modeling. The same process is at work not only between teachers and students but also between teachers as a group and between all members of the school community. In Japan, what adults ask students to do with each other is not different from what they, as adults, have to do with each other.

The power of the informal teacher professional development culture relies on the same mutual assistance modes that teachers seek to develop in students. Although schools and school districts have ongoing in-service programs, the most effective form of professional development for teachers is embedded in the organizational structure of the schools: interdependent work groups. Veteran and novice teachers learn from each other explicitly and implicitly by absorption.

At a systemic level, the breadth and diversity require a consistency and coherence to make the potentially chaotic pieces transform into effective educational growth. Thus, five more Cs are essential to maintain, especially pertaining to administration and policy making: coherence, consistency, continuity, and congruence, which all work toward cohesion.

6.5d Norms: The Ability Myth and the Labeling Dilemma

With priorities placed on togetherness, mutual assistance, whole-person education, process over product, and caring relations as the means and ends for educational growth, labeling and categorizing students for any educational sorting purpose is contradictory to the very learning goals desired. Such priorities deny meaning to concepts and practices familiar to educators in the United States: retention and skipping grades, “gifted” and “at-risk” categories, “frills,” and academics versus nonacademics. Dividing students and studies into these categories reifies the distinctions toward a degree of separation that is not only unwarranted but perhaps educationally counterproductive. Categories and labels are unjustified and inaccurate when the variety of forms and direct experiences make individual achievement in each activity somewhat unpredictable. Actual achievement is more fluid than the rigid nature of categories can reflect.

Significantly, in an educational world that stresses combining individual efforts to achieve a greater whole and in a world that stresses interpersonal

relations as a means to promote learning growth, the notion of ability as an immutable trait of an individual ceases to wield much power. Instead, the locus of power shifts to transforming innate qualities through individual and group efforts, through peer reliance and assistance, and through intelligently learning how to use one's physical and human environment to teach and learn.

As a result, classroom practices and processes look and feel differently. Discussion patterns, classroom organization, and reward-punishment structures differ from those in the United States. Varied and multiple goals and forms in combination provide innumerable avenues for securing varying degrees of success and failure for all students. Mutual assistance transpires amidst a multitude of verbal and nonverbal forms of communication. The words *teachers* and *learners* assume different meanings in different contexts, depending on which spheres of instruction are dominant. With an emphasis on group and individual effort more than ability, hopes and visions are released. People in combination gain strengths to complete what they cannot as individuals. And aspects of self in combination strengthen learning to complete a whole: emotion, human relations, sensory modes, and cognition become legitimate focal points for education and growth. In the context of this variety and holistic view, how could a singular label be valid or useful?

6.5e "Sho ga Nai," the Cultural Adhesive

Befu's (1986) concept of personhood is absolutely fundamental to understanding the Japanese notion of individual self and helps to clarify some of the previously discussed philosophical differences. When personal identity emphasizes interpersonalism, self-discipline, and role perfection, teaching-learning processes are greatly facilitated. Often success in school life and education depends on these traits. Yet self-sacrifice, hardship, and

formalism in the name of harmony and the five *Ks* have their limits. Some aspects of Japanese schooling purposefully set up difficult conditions to promote self-discipline and strength of character.

Value placed on simplicity lends itself to stark buildings and classrooms where activity and student products provide the decoration and energy. Suffering is also seen as an inescapable part of life and an important part of the learning process. Befu (1971) mentions these aspects as another expression of cultural style in Japan. Severe training, especially for character development, is common in other parts of Japanese society (see Rohlen, 1974; Kondo, 1990). As a minor example, most schools in Tokyo do not have central heating. Individual kerosene stoves heat individual classrooms; they arrive on one day (December 1) and are removed in the spring on a given day, regardless of the temperatures. I wanted to wear a jacket inside school on many winter days and I was miserably cold on some days, but since students were forbidden to wear jackets, I felt I could not. Besides character building, saving on heating costs and health are other explanations for this practice. Becoming accustomed to colder temperatures develops a stronger constitution. Crowded spaces and sparse equipment are also superficial inconveniences that must be endured to focus on the true task: learning.

Previous researchers have often mentioned these self-discipline values as important determinants of Japanese success in education. However, in the face of failure, disappointment, frustration, and irritation, or in confronting plans that have gone astray or counter to personal desires, what maintains the adherence to these values? An important counterpart and release mechanism to ensure smooth operations is reflected in the frequently repeated phrase "*sho ga nai*" (roughly translated, "There is nothing more I can do"). In other words, when a person has done all that is possible but has

had disappointing results, or if someone is forced to do something against his or her will or has no choice in the matter, "*sho ga nai*," and the person must press on. Depending on the situation, in English you might say, "too bad," or "don't cry over spilt milk," or "tough," or "oh well, there's nothing I can do about it," or in French, perhaps *Vest la vie*"comes close, but no direct translation exists. The important psychological mechanism at work is an acceptance of and an accommodation to a situation that enables a person to continue and to move on.[7] Education has many such moments, and in Japanese schools and society I heard "*sho ga nai*" frequently.

Applied to many different kinds of situations, "*sho ga nai*" takes on various meanings. As a result, no direct English translation conveys all that this handy phrase does. "*Sho ga nai*" provides a reliable avenue for varying kinds of conflict resolution, especially internal conflicts, smoothing a person's feelings. Verbalizing "*sho ga nai*" signals that the conflict has been resolved internally by the acknowledgment that this is fate or the way things must be, and everyone must still try their best (role perfection and commitment). A preeminent psychologist, Hiroshi Azuma, explained to me that it reveals a basic belief or cultural psyche that many circumstances in life are beyond one's control—the locus of control does not rest in one's own powers but with fate or in the surrounding environment, forces, or societal structures. People endure disappointment or hardship by making a psychological adaptation to the unpleasant situation rather than trying to change the situation for their personal benefit. Others explained that it comes from the Japanese recognition of the fragility of life and the power of natural disasters that they have historically had to endure, such as earthquakes. Still others feel that the phrase is abused by some Japanese who use it to absolve themselves of responsibility in a situation when they could actually do more.

Its use in context, however, is the significant factor for its utility in schooling and in teaching and learning. One important role this adaptation mechanism plays is that of an outlet—an escape valve—to reduce tensions and conflicts and be able to maintain harmony on the surface where conflicts in reality may exist. For example, teachers must work very closely together as grade-level partners in schools. Therefore, teacher assignment to grade levels (done by principals) is a critical moment. During my research, one teacher was paired with a teacher with whom no one wanted to work. His response was "*sho ga nai*" The adaptation allows for getting beyond the disappointment and moving forward in life. The following year was probably not pleasant for him, but he seemed to get along fine with the teacher in public. Students said, "*sho ga nai*" if they were stuck with some work they did not like or if they really wanted something to happen and met with disappointment instead.

Another useful aspect of this psyche from an educational standpoint is that many tasks and situations that must be confronted throughout the educational process represent disappointments or setbacks, or they require hard work and enduring inconveniences, or no one wants to do them, yet students, teachers, and parents alike must do them anyway. There often is no other choice but "*sho ga nai*." One adapts, moves on, and completes the unpleasant task. Some of the tasks are not unpleasant in nature; students just do not want to do them, or they do not want to do them when they should or the way they must.

As a researcher, this handy phrase helped to explain the contradiction I had always felt when I read so much about the Japanese ethos emphasizing effort, not ability, as the determinant for educational success. In my heart, I knew there must be plenty of times in each student's life that regardless of the utmost effort exerted, the results are not as expected, so what does one

do? I believe "*sho ga nai*" provides one answer. Importantly, the Japanese ethos is not simply a belief about effort; rather the public explicit attribution is always effort, but the implicitly understood and unstated influences include ability. More accurately stated, the Japanese ethos may be that effort is more important than ability,[8] but fate (or implicitly understood ability) still influences life's outcomes.

Similarly, I could not understand the real mechanisms underlying the Japanese value placed on perseverance and hardship, or why Japanese were so willing to follow the established rules, structures, and protocol even when everyone was inconvenienced by the situation (a trait that often drives foreigners crazy, especially Americans, who believe they control their destiny and like to alter everything to their convenience). In particular, I did not believe that simply telling children the values of hardship and suffering brought willing compliance. Again, "*sho ga nai*" helps to explain some of these mechanisms. The value is not necessarily that suffering and hardship builds character and is desirable. Instead, the realization is that people inevitably confront inconvenient, unpleasant situations repeatedly in life, so they must learn to deal with them to move forward.

Besides the obvious bickering and negotiations that occur constantly between preadolescent children, avoidance may be one person's solution. The usual bullies tend to get their way most often, and others quietly ignore the provocations, complain to friends, gossip, and settle their grievances in their own ways. Others may simply endure an inconvenient situation and say, "*sho ga nai*"

But for students who keep falling progressively further behind in their studies, can anyone be satisfied with "*sho ga nai*"? What do those students, parents, and teachers say? More importantly, what do they do? Further

study and explication of this concept is necessary to appreciate the full extent of its meaning and to answer these critical questions.

6.6 Summary

To a large extent, nationally aggregated statistics are meaningless at the individual classroom level. For example, how much does it matter to Mr. Seki if 29.6% of sixth graders attend academic *juku*, when almost 100% of his students attend? And what does it mean to Mr. Ito, who has no students attending academic *juku*? Similarly, what does cultural homogeneity mean to a teacher who still must deal with status distinctions disrupting classroom operations. Or what does cognitive equality mean to teachers who have a range of abilities and achievement levels to deal with daily in their classrooms? Many Mori students will never go to college, and several may become part of the only 6% who do not continue to high school. Yet Mr. Ito prefers teaching in Mori's district. He likes to encourage students' talents, hopes, and enthusiasm for learning, and parents trust his teaching. He bemoans the narrowing impact of the examination system on schools, which reduces education to just scoring well on tests, as is the trend in Umi's district.

The high-quality diversity observed in schools and in classroom practices expands our notion of what is basic and what is possible. High standards, along with broad goals complemented by careful means to nurture individual and group goals and achievement in diverse forms, contribute to equity ends. However, on an individual school and classroom basis, inequalities and inequities clearly exist.

The complexity of possible criteria and standards for equity multiplies due to a different conceptual framework and levels of analysis. Influences are multiple, interacting, and nested. Recognizing that individual teaching philosophies may have a strong impact on different classroom environments

and on the kinds of spheres of instruction, life in each classroom also differs in meaningful ways for individual students due to different qualities of student relations within each classroom and school. The Japanese case reveals the complexity of issues and problems in assessing equity concerns, especially when combining the micro- and macrolevels of analysis. Determining the actual degree of access to learning for individual students involves detailing their inclusion and exclusion in the different levels and spheres of instruction. Chapter 7 summarizes an analysis of equity issues based on this study.

Notes

1. "Teaching" is enclosed in quotations because several instances of teaching have occurred in addition to the teacher's main sphere. In fact, the teacher's talk is usually the catalyst that sets off a string of these subspheres.
2. See note 6 in Chapter 3 for a description of calligraphy.
3. There is much more culturally specific meaning to this term than self-discipline, but I have not yet clarified the full extent of its meaning. I did ask various teachers and parents what this word meant and what influence it had on school life and school performance, but I received so many widely scattered answers (from "very important" to "no relation at all") that I realized it merits much more detailed analysis and investigation than I could perform at the time. One next step is to delve into the significance of this term.
4. Use of the word *basics* refers to the fundamentals for any skills, knowledge, or profession. And within the school context, defined by the Japanese, basics encompass far more than the three *Rs* (reading, writing, and arithmetic).

5. Befu (1971) uses this term to describe the "pedagogical procedure in traditional arts and crafts in Japan" (p. 176), but I am using this term to describe a process I repeatedly experienced and sensed as one of many ways that teaching and learning occurred in classrooms. Some of the meaning is probably the same; however, any added interpretation here is solely my responsibility based on my findings. I must also thank Thomas Rohlen and his seminar, especially John Singleton's presentation (see next note), for helping to clarify some aspects of these conceptions in my mind, but again any misinterpretation is solely my responsibility.
6. Thomas Rohlen's seminar, "Advanced Topics in Japanese Education," at Stanford University School of Education, Tuesday, January 15, 1991.
7. I am grateful to Hiroshi Azuma for his first explanation of the psychological adaptation mechanism represented by "*sho ga nai*." This analysis of the expression is still in progress and is incomplete as of this writing. Other members of a seminar organized by Professor Tadahiko Inagaki in Tokyo and a Stanford University School of Education seminar, "Advanced Topics on Japanese Education," taught by Professor Thomas Rohlen, winter quarter, 1991, also contributed insights to this discussion. Any faulty interpretation is my own responsibility.
8. The word *ability* means different things in the two cultures. I am not clear precisely how the Japanese conceive of the term, but I believe that ability in the Japanese context is never an immutable quality of oneself. One can nurture and develop ability, or it can be inadequately developed or underdeveloped, in which case one still does not "have" it. Intelligence fits into this category. Intelligence is not an immutable

innate quality of a person. Rather, intelligence is a quality that manifests itself in interaction with one’s physical, social, and material environment. Therefore, IQ tests are meaningless to Japanese teachers because the tests do not measure the essential aspect of the use or application of intelligence in practice. Similarly, IQ tests do not reflect the effort or ways that a person displays intelligence, and this area may be the most pertinent for assessing intelligence.

7

Equality and Equity: The Japanese Case

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7.1 Historical and Ideological Base

Equality of educational opportunity, not equity, is the concept formally recognized in the aims of education in Japan, and it is a relatively recent notion in Japanese history. Its original introduction after the Meiji Restoration (1868) applied only to the elementary level. The targeted population expanded to secondary levels and to all citizens regardless of sex, creed, or nationality after World War II. However, the notion of fairness applied to ideas of equality is raised in Japanese educational circles, so there is a notion of equity whether explicitly identified or not. Notions of equality and equity focus primarily on inputs and on processes within schools and classrooms. With the emphasis placed on equality and with a notion of self defined by one's web of relations with others, equity in Japan contains a greater pressure toward uniformity and homogeneity than toward individuality of expression.

Fujita (1989) examined outcome measures and social stratification as indicators of equal educational opportunity. Scholastic achievement and educational attainment levels were highly correlated with father's occupation and education background. Because outcome measures have not factored into Japanese notions of equality or equity until recently, the contradiction of within-school equality that is set in an unequal school

structure has not been as problematic as in the United States. Inequality was justified by "meritocratic," ostensibly objective procedures for determining school entrance: the examination system. However, with increasing competition and the dramatic rise of private testing companies and private avenues for study (e.g., *juku, yobiko* [1]), Japanese concerns with inequities of the system are also rising.

Horio (1988) explores the ideological underpinnings of the present system and highlights the tension between education for the individual versus education for the state in order to provide for labor demands. Historically, the Japanese education system has served the development of the nation rather than individual fulfillment. The supreme belief in individual rights and individual determinism as understood in the United States has not been strong in Japan. Instead, societal and organizational precedence and the power of nature and other forces over human beings are prevailing beliefs: "*sho ga nai*" (Chapter 6.5).

Horio criticizes the test-driven system where status depends on "academic pedigree." He argues that good academic credentials do not reveal a person's true abilities, but they are interpreted as representing academic ability, and worse, supposedly reflecting a person's general ability. He wisely cautions against tests as the sole assessment tool: "diversification on the basis of ability is premised on a one-dimensional value system; it is an attempt to make the scale which underlies *this* value orientation the *one* and *only* valid measure of our citizens' social worth" (p. 301).

On an individual level of analysis, this study lends supports to his criticism because the findings indicate that *juku* and the test-driven curriculum may influence student status hierarchies, self-image, and attitudes toward school studies. Three contradictions are becoming

increasingly apparent: (1) the contradiction between the broader goals in elementary schools and the narrow range of skills and content on tests; (2) the contradiction between within-school equality and egalitarian beliefs on the one hand and between-school inequalities that strongly correlate with social class and father's occupation on the other hand; and (3) the contradiction between the ideal image of a well-educated good person and the reality of who is securing the "academic pedigree." In other words, students who may have admirable leadership, character, and well-rounded skills are being denied access to desirable school and career paths because of their inability to attend *juku* or to score high enough on entrance examinations.

Although this book delineates equity and equality concerns at the individual classroom and school level of analysis, and processes that foster equity may be great at this level of analysis, the profound inequality between schools and inequities in the systemic and societal levels of analysis are critical for placing this study's findings into an overall context. A nice series of essays exploring issues related to equality may be found in *Japanese Schooling: Patterns of Socialization, Equality, and Political Control*, edited by Shields (1989). Rohlen's (1983) book, *Japans High Schools*, vividly portrays between-school inequalities at the secondary school level.

Basically, the schooling system in Japan is a sorting mechanism set in a hierarchical pyramid structure. Sorting depends almost solely on examination scores, resulting in an unequal secondary school system that is tracked by school, even though no tracking exists within schools. Within-school practices still exhibit egalitarian values that favor equality between students (e.g., dress codes, subject matter study, assigned duties, events, materials, and activities). Entrance based on examination scores, while

ostensibly an objective and equitable means to determine school entrance, results in a structurally unequal system. Coupled with the rise of other institutions, such *as juku*, the objectivity of the standards come into question from the standpoint of equity: Is that which is tested the objectively legitimate knowledge? Is reliance on a single standard of assessment either equitable or objective? How does differential access to *juku* influence the supposedly objective standard meant to ensure equality of educational opportunity?

The complexity of the current state of affairs is beyond the scope of this book, but many problems of unequal access, a rigid employment system tied to academic degrees, and diminishing returns (increasing numbers competing for fewer positions) have led many to predict a crisis in school education (see Amano, Fujita, and Parts II and III, in Shields, 1989). They point to current symptoms that are becoming increasingly evident, such as school and family violence, medical problems caused by stress, school delinquency, and bullying.

Fujita (1989) points out several problems in "A Crisis of Legitimacy in Japanese Education." Among these problems are a loss of incentive for students; a failure to "validate various alternative evaluation scales to provide ample images and hopes regarding occupation and career perspectives, and hence to develop self-efficacy in students" (p. 135); density of curriculum and large class size, resulting in "a significant numbers of students [who] do not understand" (p. 136); school rituals tending toward trivialism, which "bars the development of trustful relations between students and teachers, and hence the development of cohesive school communities" (p. 136); increasing diversity of opinions due to diversified lifestyles engendered by economic growth and urbanization along with increased freedom to express opposing views; and a loss of

legitimacy for school education as the sole “agent of cognitive training” paralleled by a demise of teacher authority due to the development of other institutions (e.g., *juku, yobiko*). Clearer operational definitions, frequency statistics, and more detailed analyses of on-site research that carefully document the reported problems are necessary to appreciate the validity of these claims. Although this study does not support some of these claims, they may still reflect a slice of reality. Problems undoubtedly exist; the question is what kinds, defined by what qualities, to what degree, and how many.

Reviewing macrolevel considerations shows the importance of taking several perspectives and layers into account in order to comprehend the full picture. Clear inequalities in social structure and the structure of schooling exist in Japan, but the admirable ways that schools individually serve equity and equality ends, especially at the elementary level, may help to explain overall achievement levels, quality of workers, and a quality of life for rich and poor families that are also readily recognizable assets of Japanese society. Perhaps because within-school egalitarian values are so strong, between-school inequities are easier to dismiss at the individual level. Or, maybe teachers who try so hard to eliminate status differentials and to foster broad curriculum goals are the unsung heroes in Japan.

Yet within-school equality cannot be interpreted as equal educational opportunity unless equality exists in the larger context. Since schools are set within a structurally unequal system dependent on a single-minded assessment mechanism, and since a second school system that influences outcomes is proliferating, equal educational opportunity exists in name only.

The Japanese outlook and diversity of perspectives on educational equity and equal educational opportunity must be appreciated in their own context.

Historically and currently, Japanese society is more hierarchical than American society, and structural inequalities have always existed. Distinctions by age, sex, and other dimensions are built into the Japanese language: in each situation various parameters determine whether one should use humble or respectful language. Role perfection is incorporated into their notion of individual self. Set in this cultural context, their definition of equal educational opportunity automatically assumes different meanings. What are their views of structural educational inequality?

The interplay between macro- and microlevels is most informative and the Japanese case provides an interesting set of dynamics to explore. On-site research increases validity by depicting local realities, securing multiple viewpoints, amplifying grounded definitions, and identifying new factors. On an individual level, equality and equity may look considerably different on a case-by-case basis. At this point, abstract assertions obtain new meaning. For instance, it might be argued that the Japanese system exemplifies Bowles and Gintis's (1976) cultural and social reproduction theory. Umi and Mori differences in formality, protocol, and academic achievement emphases may also support such a claim. However, it may also be argued from a more positive standpoint that the differences reflect cultural consonance and a sensitivity for community cultural differences. Mori students obviously felt at home in their school and enjoyed it. Judgment also has to take into account a Japanese philosophy that somewhat supports cultural and social reproduction not as a negative phenomenon but as a virtue: assuming one's parents' occupations and maintaining household continuity is a reflection of filial obligation and respect for family and parents. On the other hand, some students and parents from all walks of life have diverse aspirations for education and

career options. Many Japanese still resent the lack of opportunity and loss of freedom to choose, so the theory cannot be dismissed.

In another set of examples, Mori students who wish to attend a prestigious university face quite different odds compared with Umi students; school studies for Umi students (relative to *juku* studies) receive different priority and significance compared with Mori students; Umi students who do not attend *juku* do not feel equally included or equally competent regardless of the equality of materials and learning experiences; and Wong-san and Koyama-kun do not experience equitable treatment in classroom spheres of teaching-learning. On the other hand, these schools still may have maximized access to learning possibilities for most students in a less-than-perfect world. Importantly, the Japanese are not complacent: many struggle daily to right the inequities; they criticize the weaknesses of the system; and they seek change. In a less equitable setting, Mori students may be much worse off, and students like Koyama-kun and Wong-san may experience much worse discrimination and bullying or be retained or denied access to school in another system.

The point is not to verify one argument or another but to realize that many shades of gray exist. The extent to which Umi and Mori differences reflect cultural consonance or cultural and social reproduction is a debatable issue. And the answer may simply be one of trade-offs—not a choice between right and wrong or better and worse. The commitment and caring of teachers in both schools are apparent, but they are expressed through different means that may influence equity outcomes for students. The difference in academic achievement is also not subtle, but the impacts of *juku* and family influences are impossible to separate.

Students of both communities reported career goals similar to their parents. Mr. Ito preferred teaching Mori students because of their

informality and openness to learning. Although he was aware of their tendency toward play rather than study time outside school, he spent many hours planning lessons in diverse modes to retain their interest, just as he would if he had a group of students like those at Umi. Although the number of Umi and Mori students graduating to elite middle schools is easily predictable (at least 75% and 0%, respectively), purposeful cultural and social reproduction was difficult to document and cannot be verified on the basis of this study.

Similarly, an interesting interplay occurs between person rights and property rights (Gintis, 1980; Apple, 1989).[2] According to Gintis(1980, p. 193) "a *property rightvests* in individuals the power to enter into social relationships on the basis and extent of their property," while "a *person right* vests in individuals the power to enter into these social relationships on the basis of simple membership in the social collectivity." Person rights are supreme within Japanese schools. All students have the right to unconditional participation in all learning activities and duties by virtue of their membership in the school community. And attached to these unconditional rights come certain obligations and responsibilities. As part of these duties, students organize and plan activities, thus sharing in school and classroom management and administration. But, because of systemic and societal stratification mechanisms, property rights determine between-school differences. Status differences based on *juku* attendance and on school pedigree exacerbate inequities created by the examination system.

In the end, Mehan's (1989) contentions that the macro-micro dualism be eradicated are best supported by this study because already established inequalities (macrolevel) must be faced by students alongside the equality or inequality determined for and by individuals in their daily interactions (microlevel). He refers to "constitutive action, the interpretive work which

assembles social structures … and the actions of school officials which determine whether students' behavior counts as instances of educational categories" (1989, p. 11). These categories often become labels attached to students in schools, which then become inescapable determinants of student social and academic hierarchies. As such, "the social fact of inequality emerges… to become external and constraining upon social actors" (1989, p. 16).

The phrase "whether students' behavior counts" is noteworthy because school life is rife with countless instances of passing judgments on what "counts": for attention or disregard, for recognition or neglect, for praise or punishment. Considerable implications arise as a result of such judgments: ranking, sorting, grading, including, or most poignantly, excluding. Any decision involving selection is a decision involving exclusion.

Thus, inequality in Japanese society is best understood by exploring the contributions of each level and their interacting features. By exploring constitutive action (such as bureaucratic practices, structures and official school actions) and by studying the interactional mechanisms by which social inequalities are produced (such as who receives the most attention and help), a more complete perspective is secured. As one example, the complexity of spheres of instruction and the ways teachers and students construe meaning as individuals and as a group seem more important determinants of actual student learning experiences than an investigation of policy mandates or structural inequality would reveal. Better understanding is possible by collapsing the macro-micro dualism to "demonstrate the situated relevance of social structures in the practical activities of people in social interaction." (Mehan, 1989, p. 16)

7.2 Equality and Equity in Japanese Elementary Schools

Structural inequality does not diminish the importance of admirable equality and equity provided within schools, especially at the elementary level. The Japanese elementary school experience illustrates the importance of viewing school not just as a place but also as a process—not just a process as in the passage of time but a process of structured participation opportunities in certain intellectual modes and content areas conveyed through certain representational forms and influenced by the social relations involved in the process.

Integral to the process are multiple points of inequality, and in their responses to balance these inequalities to achieve a sense of fairness and equity, teachers and students become critical players in the equity field. All become responsible for maximizing educational effectiveness for each other; the degree to which they help or hinder is the ultimate determinant of equity for each individual. The notion of interacting spheres of instruction is precisely the mechanism that attends to these issues: for example, at its simplest, most basic level, one can ask: Who gets their way? Whose voice is heard? Who makes the decisions? Who is first and last in line or in getting materials? Who is praised? Who is forgotten? Who is sought? Who is left alone?

Within schools, all students in the same grade levels are provided with exactly the same textbooks and materials. Universal participation is an inalienable right, regardless of achievement, behavior, or ability, rather than a privilege bestowed or retracted by teacher authority. A firm ethos that effort (individual and group) determines academic achievement more than innate ability is reinforced by a reward structure that values process (e.g., participation and showing maximum effort) more than outcomes (e.g., prizes for being the “best,” which set students apart). Among the process

values, the quality of relations is carefully crafted in multiple ways. One is by delegating authority to students through a wide array of duties and roles that foster interdependence. When done mindful of the intricacies of relations, such delegation can enhance self-esteem, leadership skills, a sense of self- and social responsibility, multiple levels of allegiances, and a community spirit.

A rich and engaging curriculum, shared leadership roles, and varied social grouping patterns contribute to a broader range of students having access to classroom learning and receiving recognition for success in something, even if it is not math or reading. I witnessed several instances of success in other endeavors that sparked improved attention and accomplishments in academic subjects.

In summary, equality in organizational and material provisions is commendable. Viewed over 6 years, the students have been exposed to an incredible variety of subject matters, field trips, celebrations, special events, and extracurricular activities. Productive work habits, self-discipline, will, and motivation are encouraged through nonacademic activities. Hence, “extra” curricular activities are not extra at all; rather they are indispensable vehicles for developing these valuable cornerstones for academic perseverance and growth. Moreover, all studies, activities, and events encompass high standards and are presented in a systematic, consistent fashion attuned to the incremental building of skills and topics. Significantly, due to such variety, similarity in teaching methods within subject matters does not feel dull or monotonous. To the contrary, some forms of instructional consistency help students tune into a particular subject and facilitate class management.

In the observed settings, the outstanding assortment of social, intellectual, and representational forms work in an integrated, coherent

fashion to promote learning growth in all students. The lively assortment makes school an attractive, interesting, and fun place to be. Variety also provides ample opportunities to experience many successes and failures, both seen as important to learning and growth. When handled perceptively, success and failure can motivate additional learning growth and can create serendipitous opportunities to encourage peer tutoring. Whether in art, basketball, sewing, science, or language arts, those who "are able" can assist those who are "not able." With such diversity, inevitably the "able" and "not able" change; therefore, social relations and engagement are promoted in a multidirectional fashion.

Spheres of instruction increase in complexity and effectiveness. The same students are not always the "teacher" teaching the same students who need to "get taught." The skills of social interaction and of teaching and learning are themselves taught and learned and form a central part of the teaching-learning process in the classroom. Social interaction skills become a means and an ends of the educational process along with the intellectual and representational forms. In a classroom environment where peer tutoring is a natural outgrowth of daily social relations, equity is well served by having more role models, more access to "teachers," and more opportunities to receive help and feedback.

The three forms reinforce each other in a cyclical fashion. With diversity in intellectual content, students manage to find something interesting at some point in the school day. With diversified modes of participation, students and teachers alike cultivate more elaborate, sensitive, and proficient views of themselves and each other: portrayals that become crucial in facilitating wholesome, beneficial social forms. As students develop more adept peer tutoring skills, they have even more access to "teachers" and to constructive feedback, and thus have additional means to

improve performance in varied representational forms. In turn, improved performance increases motivation and commitment and may provide greater access to intellectual content as well as further improvement in the other forms. The opportunities and avenues for accumulating well-rounded views of self and others multiply. Ideally, the cycle is one of continuous growth reinforced in many avenues from all angles.

Indeed, the classrooms, students, and teachers also taught me about more compelling aspects to add to the conceptual framework: compassion, engagement, and inspiration as irresistible elements in exemplary teaching-learning environments. Although these elements are easily detectable in admirable classrooms, they are difficult to pinpoint and quantify let alone prescribe or mandate. They may not even be fully describable, but they are contagious when they exist, and one cannot wait to leave the classroom when they are not present. Yet where do they fit in standard educational discourse?

With an ultimate goal of producing *ningen* (human beings) with *kokoro* (heart), the cycle is reinforced by four types of integration or connectedness that support equity concerns: (1) integration of various aspects of self (whole-person education); (2) biological integration of sensory development through direct experience; (3) integration of the school community; and (4) integration of inside-school with outside-school institutions and values.

“School programs that neglect developing the child’s literacy in forms of representation that sharpen the senses ultimately deprive the student of the very content he needs to use well the skills of reading and writing” (Eisner, 1982, p. 77). Besides greater academic achievement, attention to well-rounded sensory development also addresses equity concerns by expanding participation opportunities and success for students with differing degrees

of sensory refinement. This study and others document the attention to sensory awareness and direct experiences for learning growth in Japanese classrooms. Cummings (1980) portrays one fine example:

> This teacher told the students that they had to use all their senses when they worked in the classrooms: their fingers, their tongues, their eyes, and their ears. The teacher often pointed to her own eye, ear, tongue, or hands as a way of asking students to turn on one of their senses, (p. 110)

On several occasions I witnessed teachers not only praising the value of the various senses but also how they are especially refined when done with one's heart: for instance, one can easily see and hear with one's eyes and ears, but to truly see and hear with one's heart is more profound. The Japanese have special ways to write these fine distinctions.

By integrating academics into a program that emphasizes the whole person, growthful participation can be maximized in multiple ways. Attention to students' health, nutrition, personal habits, and their moral, aesthetic, physical, intellectual, and social values and skills cannot help but strengthen their growth and contribute to their vigorous, happy engagement and their ability to concentrate on academics as observed in this study. This emphasis prompted one professor to remark to me, "Don't you think the problem with elementary education is too much moral and social education? They don't study academics." Although I understood his point completely and silently disagreed at the time (I thought: it is true, moral and social concerns predominate, but why is that a problem?), my response now might be: ahh, yes, but the extra time spent in those areas allows for a more adept absorption of the academics in their appropriate time and place.

Emphasis on consideration of others and building social cohesion as the main focus of moral education[3] seems to outweigh any other single item in the school agenda. Given this emphasis, it is even more surprising that

students can do so well in their fast-paced curriculum. In part, the emphasis is necessary because the goal is more difficult to accomplish with so many individual personalities and competing perspectives. But perhaps spending less time on social cohesion and consideration of others would also result in more students falling further behind—let alone the societal, cultural ramifications in a country with such close-knit, crowded living conditions. Investigating a school in Japan without this moral, social focus (if one exists) would be a fascinating study.

Thus, from the standpoint of equity concerns, one of the most important criteria clearly exists: high standards of achievement for all students in diverse skill areas. Moreover, achieving overall high-quality results (Cummings, 1980; Duke, 1986; LeTendre, 2000; Lewis, 1984; Reischauer, 1977; N. Sato, 1991; Stevenson et al., 1990; Vogel, 1979; White, 1987) is especially admirable considering large class sizes and the absence of separating or grouping students by ability or achievement levels.

Securing such results is not attributable to within-school practices alone. Cultural consonance, student-adult congruence (i.e., student work that parallels adult work, see Chapter 6.5c), and nested layers of communities contribute to the observed processes. Nobody expects perfection or success at all times, but all participants are expected to sincerely and diligently attempt to do their best. The quality of the process includes the ways that mistakes, failings, shortcomings, and contradictions are worked out on a daily basis. Responsibility is shared, as are the rewards of success and the burdens of failure. Importantly, where one institution or individual is failing to uphold his or her responsibility, others must step in to fill the gap in order to ensure continuity. Even where broken families or cultural dissonance exist, noteworthy instances of the above educational processes still prosper.

One way to assure cross-school equity is the required rotation of teachers and building administrators to different schools within a district. Each staff person changes schools every 4 to 6 years. Rotations are divided into more and less desirable school types so that “less desirable”[4] schools are guaranteed their share of good teachers. For instance, Nagano is divided into city and isolated mountain schools, while Tokyo is divided into three districts roughly corresponding to socioeconomic class.

Regarding integration between school and outside-school institutions and integration within the school community, recall the meaning of community in the four Cs. Exploring the levels of community in Japan is like peeling back layers of an onion. The outer layer of community reflects the cultural context and the outside-school community as it works with the school to reinforce educational processes and values. The next layer is the school system itself—that is, the overall policies and structure of the system. Peeling further, the school system forms an interlocking body of nested communities: from the national level, to the province, district, neighborhood, and, finally, to the individual school. Just as schools are nested within tightly knit communities, tracing an individual student consists of a journey within carefully nested groups: from his or her desk partner, to small working groups within classrooms, to classroom identification, to grade-level identification, to whole-school identification, and further into the family and community organizations. These nested communities work together to create invaluable places of belonging for individual students.

Continuity between layers enhances the integrated nature of community. Continuity between school and outside-school agencies is encouraged in many ways: through the expansive roles and responsibilities of all participants, through standardization, through outside-school study, and

through children's organizations. The Japanese system provides for the three major goal areas postulated by Smith and O'Day (1990): (1) before-school readiness, (2) in-school high-quality instructional programming, and (3) after-school educational resources. The latter two have been documented in this book and are supplied admirably in Japan as is before-school readiness. Readiness refers to ensuring physical and educational readiness to enter school. In Japan, high-quality low-cost day care and nursery schools provide comprehensive care that working parents cannot. The family and community structures are supported by a low-cost national medical care system to ensure school readiness.

Regular medical examinations, nutrition, safety and health awareness programs, and a universal hot lunch program as part of the regular public school program help to ensure equity in these conditions. Attention to easing adjustment to major life changes occurs in many ways.[5] For first graders, school induction pays much attention to establishing the right attitudes, skills, and practicing routines to prevent any emotional trauma or shock in adjusting to school life. Some teachers reported that they spend the first month of each school year building social cohesion and training students in school procedures without actually opening their textbooks. Everyone proceeds through the same routines and expectations regardless of how "expert" or already "polished" some students may be so that those who are not as prepared may become enabled rather than "disabled." By not separating those who need more help, thereby saving them potential embarassment, the step-by-step process that all students must follow is more equitable. The same meticulous care was reported for the transition to middle school, largely through participation in clubs and *shidoo* (LeTendre, 2000; Shimizu, 1992): solidifying class identity and the right relations before concentrating on academics.

Attention to *kimochi* (feelings) is especially heightened during transition times. According to teachers, this is the most important time for getting to know their students as individuals, for building a sense of classroom community, and especially for cultivating the prime conditions (*kizuna*: belonging, security, trust, engagement) for instilling motivation. Some teachers exchange a parent-child communication notebook with each student on a daily basis. Others have each child report something while taking attendance so that each student is heard.

Integration of in-school and outside-school values is also represented by continuity across time as well as location. Relations developed between classmates and teachers are bonds that continue for a lifetime. Elementary school reunions are popular, and alumni giving is strong. My 103-year-old grand uncle (a former teacher and principal) warmly reported that former students traveled miles to visit him. Many events embrace the school community to provide memories that last a lifetime. In this context, avoiding school practices that subdivide students into categories makes sense. Divisive group labels such as “gifted,” or even “bluebirds” and “robins,” when students know what these really mean, are counterproductive to community development goals.

Special events and ceremonies are crucial means to reinforce whole-school identity and multiple levels of within-school communities. Integration within school is evidenced in the same nesting of individual, small-group, whole-class, and whole-grade-level responsibilities and diverse grouping patterns that create multiple associations between students and teachers. Students develop allegiance to a variety of other students regardless of sex, age, or other types of perceived ability. The fact that predictably most, if not all, teachers develop and support the same modes of group work helps. Often teachers in the United States attempt cooperative

group work amidst a school or classroom environment that contradicts those values. Equity may be well served by this diversity set in nested layers of cultural and organizational congruence.

A system built on progression by age rather than by achievement contains certain advantages with respect to equity concerns: cementing social bonds, building community spirit and a sense of community for age cohorts, preserving self-esteem for students who may otherwise be retained or labeled “at risk,” and improved achievement for those with uneven developmental patterns. The disadvantages may be progressively wider gaps in achievement levels among students because some cannot keep up and less than full participation by students who are immature for their age. Again, advantages turn to disadvantages and vice versa depending on the skill with which daily instances are handled.

The problems that age progression may create in achievement and maturity differentials maybe offset by the overriding power of “membership in the social collectivity” that involves “creating the rules which govern” (Apple, 1989, p. 8). The observed students have many opportunities to create the rules with their numerous school and classroom management duties. On the other hand, this participation is circumscribed by societal values and structures that limit individual choice, options, and participation. Thus, within a set structure, students have limited latitude for exercising judgment, choice, and control, but they do have some choice and control.

In order to better understand the processes by which equal or unequal distribution of knowledge and skills in society is produced, we need further insights into teaching and learning as social transactions, as a collective enterprise between students, teachers, society, and culture. The extent to which the observed schools reflect processes common in Japan is evidence that the Japanese case contributes significantly toward these ends: acquiring

knowledge is primarily a collective enterprise, meaning is construed individually and socially, and teaching and learning are fundamentally social transactions set in an intentionally crafted set of interpersonal relations.

Important norms, values, and communication and work patterns buttress successful community building and promote equity concerns: (1) universal participation; (2) equitable assignment (by rotation or chance); (3) no ability grouping (no labeling); (4) maximizing effort; (5) interdependence (delegated authority, shared roles, rotating leadership); and (6) protection of each child's vision of himself or herself as a "good child." Preserving the "good child" identity helps to explain why the four Cs (community, connectedness, commitment, and caring) and five *Ks (kankei*—relations; *kimochi*—feelings; *kuroo*—hardship, hard work; *keiken*—experience; *kokoro*—heart) stand out as classroom modes of operation. Through sensitive community building that enhances all students' identities as good people, commitment and connectedness thrive. Caring is a necessary means to effect the four Cs.

Caring embodies attention to all aspects of self and sensitivity to feelings, respectful of each child's human dignity. One essential component of developing and maintaining proper relations is constant attention to *kimochi*, both individually and collectively. Singleton (1989) also notes the importance of "good feelings" (*ii kimochi*). "Good feelings" refers to conditions (personal and overall environmental ones) as well as to relations between people. Ideally, all the sensibilities (touch, smell, sight, hearing, taste) converge to produce good feelings. I witnessed several times when teachers would sense the appropriate moment to begin a class or assess the emotional tone with a quick comment under their breath: "ahh, *ii kimochi*," meaning "now is the right time" or "this will be good today."

Developing certain communication norms is imperative for eliciting maximum participation because the norms create a relatively safe environment for self-expression. For example, one should use the language of respect and begin with praise when referring to others and use humble language and criticism when referring to oneself. Teachers, too, speak of their own mistakes and shortcomings as a way to encourage students to speak up. Verbal expressions that show respect for others' views and feelings also encourage input; students learn how to praise, how to criticize, how to take responsibility for mistakes, how to apologize, and importantly, how to show consideration of others' feelings, while also expressing their own opinion to be able to work out disagreements.

In class meetings, student leaders call on people if not enough views have been expressed, and sometimes during conflict resolution sessions or evaluation times, everyone is expected to say something. Hearing each voice validates each person as having equal membership in the community. When mistakes or failures occur, rather than a climate of blame and fingerpointing, a climate of problem solving and a search for learning opportunities prevails. In fact, blaming others is viewed as a weakness.

The most frequent slogans in schools emphasize togetherness: *kokoro o hitotsu* (make our hearts one), *chikara o awasete* (combine our strengths), and *naka yoku suru* (get along well with each other). In particular, the first one nicely epitomizes the ultimate goal for cooperation and togetherness: to unite everyone's hearts (minds, bodies, and feelings) as one. When asked to list 5 traits of a "good student," student and parent surveys overwhelmingly listed *yasashii* (kind, gentle, affectionate), followed by *omoiyari* (considerate of others, helps others), and *benkyo ga yoku dekiru* (one who does well in studies) was a close third, followed by *atama no ii* (smart).

Placing a priority on getting along with others and on developing students as human beings (*ningen*) with hearts (*kokoro*) highlights the relational basics in elementary classrooms. These areas were not considered in my original conceptual framework and are not given much attention by U.S. policy makers, yet they may be the most important. Equitable provision of physical and material conditions for learning may be a necessary but not sufficient means to attain learning goals. Safe schools may rest more securely on a foundation built with the relational basics than with more punishment, policing, or metal detectors. Specific links to cognitive development aside, carefully nurturing the relational basics undoubtedly contributed to enviable classroom management patterns that involved most students in learning activities and facilitated concentration on academic work. American educators would be thrilled to be able to leave their classrooms and trust that students would run the class smoothly without adult supervision as happens in Japan.

Establishing comprehensive standards for the four Cs and five *Ks* may improve academic achievement and move us closer to our desired equity goals beyond the mundane but serious consideration of distribution of goods and test scores. Viewing the Japanese educational program and processes as a whole, a broader conception of cognition, education, and thus the basics serves the participants well and promotes equity concerns.

On a systemic level, the Japanese case indicates that five more Cs are effective mechanisms to engender and sustain reform toward greater equity: *coherence* (between all levels), *consistency* (in application), *continuity* (of methods that work), *congruence* (among all parts of the system), with all of this working to promote *cohesion*.

7.3 Inequality and Inequity in Japanese Elementary Schools

Equality is the slippery side of equity: where it may serve the greatest number and set the same starting point, it also neglects the differential capacities to take advantage of that starting point, and hence it neglects those who need differential consideration. In the same vein, despite praiseworthy efforts to provide equality of educational opportunity, surface equality can be unequal depending on the circumstances. For example, all students may receive the same book, but if it is too difficult to read or it is of intense interest to some while virtually irrelevant to others, then other criteria for equality are called to question. Similarly, even though government funding may be equalized, and facilities and equipment may be more equal than those found in the United States (Cummings, 1980), Umi, Mori, and other schools reveal that inequalities exist, especially taking into account alleged alumni donations.

Inevitable inequalities exist in student opinions of each other. Examples of criteria that may influence a student's inclusion or exclusion in a play group or in the spheres of instruction are: athletic ability, strong or weak, shy or aggressive, nice or mean, fat or skinny. Natural inequalities exist in the amount of attention attracted and in the amount of assistance and advantages received only because certain students are stronger, smarter, louder, more popular, or faster. These form critical elements in the daily determination of equity from an individual student's standpoint, though they remain unexamined in most research or are deemed unimportant from an adult point of view. Some of these criteria are the strongest determinants of inclusion and exclusion in spheres of instruction at the classroom level. Better elaboration of student-formulated criteria for whom they favor and whom they neglect and how they affect instructional spheres is necessary.

Discrimination by sex was minimal in the observed schools. Almost no distinctions between boys and girls were made explicitly, except a few times when boys were given heavy items to carry, while girls were assigned duties like transporting flowers or cleaning. Mr. Ito sometimes made comments about student participation by remarking, “Why aren’t girls (boys) raising their hands?” or “Oh, only the girls (boys) know the answer.” On several occasions, he tried to get girls to speak up more in class discussions. Girls and boys informally selfselected themselves into single-sex play groups and clubs, though Mori boys and girls mixed more readily than Umi boys and girls. Boys and girls equally participated in all studies and activities with equal expectations on the part of teachers. Yet girls were aware of cultural and societal inequities between the sexes, evidenced by remarks such as, “I wish I were a boy; they get to do anything.” Girls tended to be less confident, less outspoken, and less aggressive than boys in most discussions, meetings, and playtimes. However, I was unable to detect reinforcement of gender inequities in classroom practices, though perhaps my language ability limited access to subtle cues. Further research into this area would be welcome and valuable.

Who are those underserved in the Japanese case? One dilemma is that the same facets that promote a wonderful community spirit and broad-based participation within schools also cause another form of inequity for those who do not keep pace with the crowd, who do not fit in, or who need special consideration. Could Mr. Seki and Mr. Ito devote more individualized instruction to those students without disrupting the sense of community, their self-esteem, or the standards for equality? Are Mori students destined to educational and career paths of lesser opportunity because emphasis is lacking on the academic curriculum or on proper forms

of behavior? Would they be better or worse off if they had less art, music, or physical education in order to add more academics?

Teachers often complained that they cannot individualize instruction or give enough time to those who fail to grasp concepts and skills quickly. Students more in charge of classroom management may abuse their powers, and some students maybe picked on more than others, even to the severe extent of bullying (*ijime)*[6], although I did not see any extreme cases of bullying in my schools. Providing special services to a few students may disrupt a sense of class unity and create discord in the unequal provision of activities that it represents. Intervening in student-delegated responsibilities may destroy the goals of learning how to assume responsibility.

Thus, the strengths of the Japanese system may also be the seeds for its weaknesses. High standards for everyone are admirable, but teachers must teach to an average case. As a result, a great majority are well served, and questionable cases may benefit by the increased challenge rather than fall behind as might happen in the United States. The upper levels and lower levels are less well served in some ways, but if more resources go to more specialized individual services, less resources are available for the diverse program currently offered to all: an interesting catch-22. A private second school system exists to accommodate specialized services, but parents must have the means to take advantage of that system.

The examination system may lead to greater cognitive achievement measured by standardized tests and to greatly increased study time for some students, but at what personal and curricular costs? Students with no playtime must be missing out on at least one vital aspect of childhood. No system is perfect for everyone. Every system produces its own dropouts, and the Japanese have redefined the term in an interesting way. In addition to those who drop out because of failure, alienation, or social isolation, the

Japanese system has dropouts because of increased academic pressure. On the alarming side, intense academic pressures cause some students to develop medical ailments and neuroses that prevent them from attending school. On a less unfortunate side, some students do not attend schools near entrance examination time so that they can cram for the tests. Ironically, the latter drop out because the school system does not provide enough academically. Recall the student at Umi who showed up the first day of class during the last trimester and did not come to school again until the day after the middle school entrance examinations. He spent every day studying on his own, supervised by his mother; however, others enroll in special schools. On examination days, Umi sixth-grade attendance was only 10–20% compared with nearly 100% at Mori. This must impact the sense of community, student participation, and spheres of instruction within schools: special services can produce inequities while providing for other equities.

The *juku* phenomenon actually represents an interesting compromise for a public school system that cannot accommodate those who want advanced study. In the United States, if public schools are not providing the education that parents want for their children, they leave the public school system for private schools. Although the same thing happens in Japan, a large number remain in the public school system but utilize *juku* and outside-school study as the means for their advancement. In one sense, the public school system is not abandoned as happens in some U.S. communities. In looking outside the regular public school system to gain the cognitive advantage, the roles of schools and teachers are undermined to a certain extent, or at the very least, their importance is diluted.

The entrance examination system imposes increasing pressures on public elementary schools because more and more students in younger grade levels are attending *juku*. Pressures are both negative and positive. On the

positive side, since tests are the overwhelming criterion for the future, students are highly motivated to succeed in academic studies, particularly on tests. Schools with more students on this path have little difficulty encouraging school study for these tests. An indirect positive influence may be improved teaching-learning because these students add peer pressure to other students, and if handled well, they may serve as positive role models and helpful tutors. Overall standards for achievement remain high because examination content requires a fast-paced full curriculum for public school teachers. Another positive consequence for Japan's overall image (but not necessarily for students or teachers) maybe better performance on the international science and math tests that attract admiration from abroad. The latter is a dubious distinction, however, and most Japanese teachers and parents expressed more negative feelings about the pressures.

Some aspects that yield possible positive effects have negative consequences at the same time. Based only on the two main schools in this study, examination pressures may be influencing alarming trends that contradict the egalitarian notion set forth in the 1947 Fundamental Law of Education. Those who can pay for extra schooling aimed solely at passing those tests tend to be more successful in securing entrance into elite schools: the educationally rich get richer.

Besides undermining the roles of schools and teachers, their professional independence and authority are compromised in another, perhaps more regrettable way. A test-driven curriculum detracts from the broad-based elementary goals, both in terms of student attitudes toward nontested material and in terms of time to be able to fit in other studies and activities. Pencil-and-paper examinations emphasize discrete knowledge testable in standardized test formats. Students focused on test scores seem to be getting less from the elementary curriculum—specifically less well-developed

social, moral, physical, and aesthetic skills and values. If Umi and Mori students represent the differences between test-oriented and non-test-oriented students, Umi students' accomplishments in nontested subjects fell below those of Mori students but were superior in tested subjects.

Students placed higher priority on *juku* homework and studies than on the regular school curriculum, which erodes the role of the teacher and disrupts the sense of community. Teacher creativity is constrained by parent and student pressures to focus on the curriculum covered on the tests. Attention to a narrow range of content areas thereby forces an imbalance, and worse, circumscribes teacher prerogative and creativity to teach other material. Worse yet, if schools and teachers respond to the *juku* pressures, then those who do not attend *juku* face a triple loss: no *juku* or extra schooling, less variety in their regular school program, and a potential loss in self-esteem and self-confidence as a result.

By definition, test taking is an individually competitive act divorced from reliance on one's peers. The overriding social goals of the elementary curriculum are negated. In my eyes, the most dangerous offshoot of this trend is that the same heartwarming caring and group solidarity I observed in Mori was less noticeable at Umi. In their interactions with me and with each other, Mori students especially taught me the power of security and belonging, generosity and consideration, unconditional inclusion and membership. Yet these students will undoubtedly form the ranks of blue-collar workers and laborers in career paths that will not necessarily end in leadership positions. On the other hand, while Umi students were similarly good students, they were also more self-centered and did not help others unconditionally. Some students were not as included, and the pain of isolation or constant teasing was felt. Umi students were more status conscious and were involved in less community activities and in less

traditional Japanese activities. Yet these students will eventually run companies or be leaders. One wonders how they will lead.

I am left with many questions. Could more direct teacher intervention have made any real impact? Would it have destroyed peer and self-supervision mechanisms? To allow peer mechanisms to work out the difficulties, one must bear with short-term sacrifices and pain in order to secure long-term gains in leadership skills, in conflict resolution skills, and in peer and self-supervision. Whether or when to intervene becomes a dilemma.

One must also wonder about the personal effects of fully programmed schedules that do not allow much playtime with friends. Cliques, social status differences based on *juku*, and individualistic tendencies that disrupted interdependent relations are the most detrimental social effects, while definitions of “smart” and “dumb” based on *juku* attendance seem to be the most disturbing personal effects. But would these tendencies exist even without *juku*, and would students just use different criteria for discrimination? At any rate, the educational challenge for Mr. Seki and his students with over 90% attending academic *juku* is quite different than that for Mr. Ito and his students with less than 10% attending academic *juku*. I suspect that if Mr. Ito and Mr. Seki were given the exact same students to teach, their classrooms would still exhibit considerable differences in style, format, and content.

Other underserved groups are those who are left out of the spheres of instruction and those who need special attention for various reasons: special needs, language, race, and culture differences, or simply not fitting in by Japanese standards. Although no dropouts due to ostracization and school failure were observed in this study, their cases need to be examined more carefully. Nonnative Japanese speakers may have difficulty in Japanese

elementary schools depending on how sensitively teachers and students respond. I have heard many positive reports from Americans who have placed their children with limited Japanesespeaking skills into regular Japanese elementary schools; however, foreigners receive differential treatment depending on their ethnicity. Special programs for accommodating language differences do not exist: one observed exception was a pull-out program for one boy.

One content area clearly lacking in the Japanese elementary curriculum is multicultural and international content in social studies. Through the sixth grade, Japanese students study only Japanese language and Japanese history, geography, economy, and culture. Considering their growing role in the international community, controversies their political leaders have stirred with comments regarding other countries and minority populations, their own increasing multicultural diversity (labor shortage resulting in an influx of laborers, especially from neighboring Asian countries), and their own history in dealing with minority populations (see note 14 in Chapter 2), they may need to reconsider their social studies curriculum.

Criticism and problems resulting from the centralized system need more systematic investigation than provided here. It might be argued that national control engenders standardization that fosters equity at a national level. High standards, mandated curriculum, uniform school organization, and set levels of government funding ensure a certain quality across Japan. However, standardization itself is a double-edged sword that works for and against equity concerns. As the centralized standardization filters down to local realities, the sameness of standardization yields differential implications when confronted with competing priorities. Diversity at the local level demands flexibility in the face of standardization when

addressing equity concerns. Yet too much tinkering can yield still another set of inequities.

These two kinds of standardization interact to create a dynamic tension between forces of equity: a top-down standardization and abottom-up (grounded) standardization. The top-down standardization is handed down by tradition and is dictated by the upper levels of the hierarchical structure and imposed onto local sites.[7] Yet there is a grounded standardization that results from peer and community pressures, traditions, and other local forces. These pressures create divergence from imposed mandates as well as impose forms of standardization in their own right. Some local forces reinforce those that are imposed. From a student and teacher point of view, the most obvious grounded standardization is felt in pressures regarding modes of participation, appearance, expression of opinions, following protocol, and peer pressures in general.

On the other hand, consistency in standardized materials, procedures, and expectations enables parents and students to help each other cope with diversity. Thus, mutual assistance and cooperation are facilitated, and shared experiences and expectations develop traditions and community in the long run. Accountability is made possible through explicit expectations and implicit peer pressure (with both helpful and bothersome implications). At one parent-teacher meeting, a parent raised her concern that her friends third-grade child was studying abacus, and her son had never learned it and was already in the fifth grade. Conversely, parents are accountable as well: the pressures to participate in annual activities and support their childrens studies are strong, and because the times, studies, and expectations remain similar each year, no one can claim ignorance.

These two forces of standardization emerge from opposite ends but meet in the classroom arena to find their reality. Therefore, regarding educational

equity concerns, this reality must be examined to determine the value and extent of the impact of these two forces of standardization. Top-down standardization is interpreted and personalized in classroom interactions. Grounded standardization is born in the interaction and becomes more of a force to be reckoned with than an abstract set of ideas to be adapted. At this level of idiosyncratic adaptation, standardized practices are the raw materials in the hands of active teachers and students. For despite justifiable criticism and resentment of national mandates that reduce local control, this study found that enough diversity existed such that no week followed the posted schedule, and that even with constant teacher consultation within and between grade levels, each classroom studied and completed its lessons in diverse ways, sometimes dramatically so.

Perhaps Japanese education succeeds both in spite of and because of the Ministry of Education dictates and mandated curriculum. Certain educational necessities and equity safeguards may survive because of consistency in centralized control, well-constructed guidelines, dependable levels of funding, clear-cut leadership, accountability, channels of communication, and channels of decision making. Without this consistent framework, teachers may be rendered helpless or overloaded with the time and energy demands required to create a curriculum and a framework or to keep re-creating them in response to a multitude of competing demands.

Freedom of total curriculum planning is sacrificed in return for freedom to innovate and to build upon that which is given. The assurance (good and bad) that teachers are bound by the national curriculum is balanced by the reassurance that at a minimum level the curriculum is guaranteed in an array of subject matters, field trips, activities, events, and responsibilities. In the most pessimistic view, even if a Japanese teacher did not want to do anything but follow the scripted guidelines, students would still receive

exposure to diverse intellectual, representational, and social forms. The main point is that deliberating equity concerns involves trade-offs. An established calendar or prescribed set of activities maybe restrictive in one sense, but more fertile teaching-learning experiences may result, because the consistency enables more students and families to participate, to help each other, and to support teacher and school goals. Requisite teacher interdependence, like requisite student interdependence, ensures that one cannot stray too far, but it may also restrict a creative teacher's potential experimentation. Freedom is lost and freedom is gained. With shared responsibilities, unexpected time commitments occur when one person may have to complete what another cannot, yet that person may unexpectedly learn or benefit in other timely ways.

Local control of certain aspects of the educational program is relinquished in return for local control on a daily basis within each site. Mandates may be imposed from elsewhere, but in the observed successful settings there was a respect for the autonomy and judgment of those most closely involved. Importantly, the given structure includes commendable teacher participation in school management and program planning. The observed teachers were free to exercise their intelligence and direct their creative energies to sculpt the mandates to fit their individual situations, thereby increasing their efficacy in the classroom. This flexibility and autonomy are critical in order to transform the mandated curricula into engaging, exciting, and lively learning experiences. Where intellect is harnessed, self-confidence is weak, or student engagement is absent, standardization has not served educational ends. Regardless of the best of centralized intentions, true learning and vibrant communities emerge only through the efforts of a cadre of dedicated, thoughtful practitioners who can

mold policy intentions to fit their own situations and their students' individual needs and personalities.

Though the Ministry of Education will mandate educational programs, it does not adjust funding levels to schools based on test scores or on some other assessment criteria based on outcomes. As far as I know, outside evaluators do not investigate school programs, and a well-developed field of educational evaluation does not exist in Japan as it does in the United States. Accountability emanates from the quality of relations: it depends on mutual understanding and trust to a certain extent; on peer pressure (and behind-the-scenes communication) to a larger extent; and on the participants' and communities' reactions to the largest extent. An interesting study would be to trace how actual accountability works. Each school performs an annual internal evaluation to submit to the local board of education, but I do not know what standards for assessment, outcome measures or other process variables, and sources of data are utilized.

In sum, exploring equity and equality issues in another cultural context presents new challenges for how equity may be conceived and achieved, including what to avoid. Schooling cannot please or accommodate everyone, even with the best of intentions and resources. Hence, the critical point is to acknowledge those who are less well served with each decision and try to accommodate them in other ways. In terms of equity, trade-offs must be examined and illuminated. This book reveals that examining the interplay between macro- and microlevel analyses and exploring inputs, processes, and outcomes at the individual levels of analysis may penetrate more deeply into persistently troubling issues and therefore merits attention in the equity research framework.

The individual level of analysis is vital for understanding the intricacy and multiplicity of factors that strongly impact students and their learning in

daily classroom life. After all, equity concerns are ultimately the concerns of each individual. For each student, equity exists in the daily instances of advantage and neglect, inclusion and exclusion in the classroom dialogue, all of which rest on judgments and interactions of the moment. Not all instances can be fair, but on balance the degrees to which students and teachers strive to be fair are the critical determinants. This delicate balance is the essence to the art and craft of equity, and the essence rests in the heart of the individual.

No amount of standardization can fully address this all-important level of equity, but the notion of spheres of instruction may provide a telling framework for including this level of analysis in equity research. As a conceptual framework, intellectual, representational, and social forms cast a wide net for investigating a range of equity concerns, while the interaction of the three forms is also informative. Future research needs to further elaborate the forms and their interactions with a larger sample size, even systematically selecting classrooms. For example, select schools and teachers with the samejwfcw-attending population as Umi but with a greater emphasis on a wide variety of representational forms, and conversely, study a population like Mori, but without the same sense of community and diverse representational forms that Mr. Ito provided.

Educational costs are unavoidable. At an individual level of analysis, some will inevitably lose. The question becomes: How many of which students are not being reached, and in what ways? And what can be done about it? Based on the limited number of cases in this study, an accelerated learner and a student who cannot keep up are not well accommodated. Outside-school organizations provide what schools do not, and in many ways, cannot. But parents must have the means to take advantage of these outside private mechanisms. With the proliferation of outside-school means

of education, additional issues arise. How much do they complement or contradict the school system? How are students impacted? An examination of Umi and Mori student lives and their definition of who is “smart” and who is “dumb” reveal some alarming trends.

Teachers can be influential players in counteracting alarming trends, thereby determining the balance between equity and inequity. They can inspire hope and plant dreams or reinforce the status quo. To touch a student and to nurture classroom hearts require more than mandates, standards, effective curriculum, and structures. Indeed, an integral part of the art and craft of teaching is the art and craft of community building in equitable ways.

7.4 Genuine Community as Equity: The Art and Craft of Teaching

“What skilled teaching requires is the ability to recognize dynamic patterns, to grasp their meaning, and the ingenuity to invent ways to respond to them…. An imaginative leap” (Eisner, 1983, p. 9) is required between the generalities of theories, principles, and policies and the particularities of interacting minds, hearts, and bodies that teachers face.

The observed Japanese teachers exhibited this ability and sensitively included as many students as possible into the classroom dynamic. In part, their ability to respond to dynamic patterns resulted from a degree of professional freedom: freedom of time and space within the classroom arena and freedom from the basic task of constructing the framework and structure. They responded to the social and personal dynamics as well as to the cognitive ones. Notably, their abilities are not just intellectual, artistic, and social; they also display simple common sense and an alert sense of timing and intuition. The diversity in activities and processes reflects rich ingenuity in their repertoire. When teachers are not the appropriate ones to

decide meaning, they solicit student opinions and allow each participant to tell his or her side of the story, especially in conflict resolution. Like so many aspects of classroom life, meaning is also socially constructed.

Japanese teachers also seem to have in instinct for securing the imaginative leap. If not, they have their colleagues and students to help make that leap as they teach and learn together. One Osaka teacher could not kick a soccer ball properly, so a fellow teacher came to demonstrate different kicking and dribbling styles. Mr. Ito had Mrs. Fujita (a calligraphy artist) come to teach his students calligraphy, and in return, he presented a history lesson through poetry.

A first-grade teacher presented her students' drawings of persimmons to fellow teachers to solicit feedback. She was disappointed in the students' inability to use color more realistically. In my American ignorance, I was thinking, "Well, for first graders, that's pretty good." Immediately, a veteran teacher asked, "How were the persimmons placed for students to observe?" The novice first-grade teacher replied, "Oh, I just put several branches on a table." With a knowing smile, the veteran teacher perused, "What was the point of the lesson?" "To depict the actual colors they saw," the novice replied. "Well, look at these drawings," continued the veteran, "The students seem more concerned with the number of branches and persimmons you laid on the table. They were concerned with counting. If you want them to focus on color, just place one persimmon on the table. Then with close inspection, they will see that it is not all orange, that some spots are yellow, and some lighter orange areas become progressively darker, almost red." Fortunately, I was also in the teachers' room when the novice teacher gleefully brought back her second attempt. I was astonished. Each picture of a single persimmon revealed not only astute renditions of

the diverse colors in one persimmon, but the students' creations reflected their wonderfully distinct personalities and individuality.

This incident was memorable in two ways. First, I realized that in the act of being an ethnographic researcher, I, too, was learning how to become a better teacher the same way many Japanese teachers do: through collegial sharing—watch, listen, absorb. While observing the ways they critically assessed their teaching and students' work, my own understanding became more refined. Moreover, this kind of sharing and learning prompted a pedagogical excitement: I wanted my own classroom to try out the new ideas. Just as I was invigorated by this pedagogical excitement, this same professional context for teachers may help to boost their energy and morale in the face of such a grueling schedule.

The most powerful mechanism for teacher professional development and in-service training may be occurring in their daily interactions rather than in programs offered by districts, universities, or the Ministry of Education. To do this, teachers need regularly structured times and places to be together and apart, and they must share the philosophy that working together serves a valuable purpose. Along with the annoyance of extra time and work come the benefits of mutual support and learning: both require *patience* and open hearts and minds, a willingness to be touched.

Second, this incident, like so many others during the course of my research, expanded my American notions of the capability of elementary students of all grades. On a regular basis, I had to confront my restricted notions as teachers displayed works that I thought were outstanding, yet they sought improvement. Looking at the paintings of live lobsters done by Mori first graders, I marveled at the detail and the use of color and would have been highly satisfied with similar results. Yet these teachers, while fully appreciative, also suggested techniques for shading. Listening to the

cassette tape of second graders vigorously singing a complicated song in two-part harmony, I was impressed and had no expertise to offer. Meanwhile, these teachers had the sheet music in front of them, following along, and they had suggestions for improving voice projection and the teacher's conducting techniques. Watching the videotape of fourth graders doing headsprings over the vaulting horse, my feelings were that they were successful. These teachers suggested ways to have students spring in a higher arch off the vault. In this teacher research group, even more impressive was that teachers did not select better examples to show-and-tell; they shared every work done in class to give an idea of the quality range. I do not recall seeing one example I thought was clearly deficient. I wonder what these teachers thought.

I then wondered if we are doing a disservice to our children in the United States and to our teachers by expecting so much less, especially in art, physical education, music, and sharing responsibility. We tend to accept any quality and praise it as "nice" in order to encourage effort and build self-esteem but without giving specific advice or requiring revisions aspiring for excellence. I now question this benign acceptance of mediocrity. Japanese teachers praise effort but are more careful to praise only a truly good aspect and constructively criticize another in order to stretch the students' capabilities. Students seem to respond, and in their improvement, they know in their hearts when they have done something truly "nice." One sprightly first grader proudly showed her teacher her richly colored painting of tulips. The teacher admired the boldness and praised the color, but she sat the girl in front of the tulips (the class was outside) and said, "Look at the leaves. Where are they attached to the stem?" The girl smiled and began to alter her painting. Nothing is as powerful for self-esteem as continual

improvement, especially stemming from specific feedback toward higher-quality work: earned excellence.

Sometimes teachers are at a loss for words to explain how to improve but convey the need to improve in other ways. After what I thought was a breathtaking rendition of a song, one Nagano teacher said with a disappointed tilt of her head, “Something is missing.” I had no idea what she could possibly mean. She continued, “I cannot describe what it is in words, but… here … just listen,” and she played a tape of other students in the same grade level singing the same song. These students had won first prize in the national choral singing contest. We listened and gasped at the end. The teacher simply said, “Like that…” The students chuckled and said, “Oh, sure, teacher …” but they sang their song again. I was pleasantly surprised, as they were, because the improvement was distinguishable.

As these examples reveal, teachers learn from more reflective exchanges and consultations, but they also must make continual judgments in the process of teaching: “Because the classroom … is a dynamic enterprise, teachers must be able to read the dynamic structures of signification that occur…. The teacher must be able to call on or invent a set of moves that create an educationally productive tempo within a class” (Eisner, 1983, p. 11). When the primary educational concerns are not only teaching and learning but also to reach the most students respectful of their individuality and human dignity, the art and craft of teaching is also the art and craft of equity. In reading these dynamic structures and in creating an educationally productive tempo, teachers exercise their art and craft of equity by the ways they manage to sensitively tune into individual students, and in the end, maintain an equitable, successful inclusion of all students in the teaching-learning dialogue. How does one detect and then respond to the vulnerable soul, the waning self-confidence, a wandering spirit, or disintegrating self-

esteem? How much are teachers aware of the factors that affect inclusion and exclusion, advantage and neglect, success and failure in their classrooms?

A robust set of research (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman, 1990; Little, 1982; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin, 1994; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2000; Talbert, 1993) that recognizes the invaluable role of teacher learning communities has strongly advocated for more collegial teacher professional conditions, many of which are commonplace in Japan (Inagaki, 1994; Kobayashi et al., 1993; Shimahara & Sakai, 1995; M. Sato et al., 1993; N. Sato & McLaughlin, 1992; Yang, 1994). Contrary to the egg crate metaphor (Lortie, 1975) of teacher isolation found commonly in the United States, the Japanese can barely find a time or place to be isolated in schools even when they want or need it. Their problem may be the opposite: teachers know so much about what each other is doing that they feel burdened with peer pressure. They may lack the individual space and time for quiet reflection and for individual planning.

The most compelling argument for teacher learning communities is the ongoing site-specific professional development teachers gain from sharing expertise and experience. Again, the Japanese case excels in this regard, perhaps because in their own education they had to learn to work with others. However, the constant rotation of personnel to different schools and a school calendar replete with special events that allows only 10 days between school years for teachers to prepare for teaching a different grade level[8] also present organizational incentives for such collegiality. Standardization seems imperative as it provides a common framework and a meeting ground for educational discourse, participation, and accountability across the nation. Forced teacher rotation and the common

framework extends critical networking opportunities for teachers,[9] thereby providing further channels for professional development.

Increased interdependence and collegial sharing may decrease teacher burnout and renew commitment and growth. Eliminating duplication of energies may increase creative outlets elsewhere. Provided with a baseline, well-planned, integrated curriculum that has been field tested for years by model practitioners, teachers may concentrate on improving and adapting lessons in other ways. Cross-grade continuity especially enhances learning possibilities: for instance, sixth-grade teachers know they can teach certain science experiments using Bunsen burners because they are assured that students learned how to use the equipment and have already studied the properties of matter in earlier grades. Or, teachers can integrate their language arts program by having students write songs and illustrate stories with high-quality results because they know that students have learned to read music and paint with watercolors in other studies.

In fact, Japanese teacher education programs and practice teaching are negligible[10] compared with American programs, yet their novice teachers learn quickly in the close collegial environment in schools. The necessity of collegial sharing and support is heightened since the roles and responsibilities of teachers and teaching in Japan cast such a wide net: covering students' lives on and off campus, during school time and vacations, and extending to areas considered unthinkable in the United States—for instance, use of vacation time, off-campus appearance, and personal habits and hygiene (Inagaki & Ito, 1990, 1991). This makes the art and craft of teaching and of equity even more complex.

Several factors hinder better professional development, such as Japanese work schedules (long days, few vacation days) and their expansive set of responsibilities (administrative, teaching, outside-school). Like their U.S.

counterparts, Japanese teachers wanted more compelling in-service education offered at the district level, better preservice education and training, more time off for professional development, and more respect for teachers as professionals, not as government servants. The most common criticisms were large class size and restrictions and reforms imposed by the government. But in my mind, the strength of the informal professional culture of teachers may be the most prominent vehicle for developing professional excellence (M. Sato, 1990, 1991, 1992): their teacher research groups, extended friendship networks, and the daily collegial sharing and reflecting upon work in progress.

Schools need an "organizational structure in which teachers and administrators can reflect on their activities as a regular part of their jobs" (Eisner, 1983, p. 12). Respect for reflective activity seems to be a natural part of Japanese schooling and other teaching-learning processes and is built into many aspects of their society and lifestyles. Moreover, reflection is combined with spiritual, aesthetic, and physical aspects: consider, for example, meditation, martial arts, tea ceremony, calligraphy, and flower arranging. Reflection is a highly valued means to develop self- and social discipline as well as personal and group growth. Formally organized reflection occurs frequently as a means of self- and group assessment toward improvement; for example, group reflection time for teachers occurs after events and field trips and during in-service workshops and staff meetings. Although staff meetings, school-based in-service training, and time for other administrative duties occur every Wednesday afternoon, most teachers would appreciate more individual reflection and planning time.

The reasons for such dedication are summarized nicely by Eisner (1983, p. 13): "Craftspersons and artists tend to care a great deal about what they do, they get a great deal of satisfaction from the journey as well as from the

destination, they take pride in their work, and they are among the first to appreciate quality."

The Japanese case also adds aspects to the art and craft of teaching, and these aspects simply defy standardization. The fact that Japanese teachers are able to leave their classrooms without hiring substitutes reveals a set of classroom relations and a sense of student responsibility that are cultivated, not dictated. To work together in such a way that students and teachers cry together when they reach their desired goal or that students sing songs that hold audiences in breathless admiration is a dynamic that is nurtured, not mandated. And that learning-disabled students can be incorporated with feeling into all activities, studies, and recesses on a daily basis, or conversely, that minority or other students may be severely isolated or picked on with an alarming lack of consideration of feelings, reveal both the bright side of sensitivity and the dark side of insensitivity that are products of mindful vs. mindless interpersonal interactions.

Discrimination is a primary example. It can be legislated in form, but not in the heart. I vividly recall the words of one atomic bomb victim (*hibakusha*)[11] as she spoke to a *burakumin* parent, deeply disturbed by discrimination, wondering why people could not simply see each other as fellow human beings, each with the same basic needs and desires: to eat, to sleep, to be happy, safe, and secure, and to care for family. In her soft-spoken manner, the truth of her wisdom touched me: "Discrimination is not a problem of knowledge, nor of laws and legislation. Discrimination is a problem of the heart."

When she spoke, an incredible irony struck me. At the same time that my research observations had led me to conclude that a significant inspirational aspect of teaching-learning in Japanese elementary schools was the centrality of caring, the priority placed on relations, and developing one's

heart and concern for others, I also realized that one of the most critical and insensitive aspects of the same educational experience is the lack of heart or caring extended to certain people.

Some teachers, especially those observed in one minority school I visited in Osaka, put forth extraordinary efforts to educate their students about discrimination and how to fight against it. They work long hours and diligently strive to eliminate discriminatory practices within the school system and society in general. I met many Japanese with beautifully open hearts, deeply reflective about social problems and the ills of Japanese society and education, but until Japanese who have open hearts (caring extended to all human beings) can reach those with closed hearts (caring extended to only mainstream Japanese), discrimination will persist in their society. The same is true for any society. And since so many problems are basically those of the heart rather than of the mind, perhaps education ought to begin with the heart. Or at the very least, educational concerns of the mind should parallel those of the heart. Nurturing intelligence seems to miss the point if it is not humanized intelligence, and in Japanese schools humanized intelligence is supposedly incorporated in their emphasis on developing *ningen*,[12] not just a knowledge base. Regarding multicultural awareness and understanding of minority or foreign cultures, Japanese society is no different than others in its need to work to improve the problem.

These examples reveal ample areas that comprise an essential realm of educational equity, and they exist only in the world of direct experience. Actual access to each teaching-learning experience depends on mutual exchanges, and the nature of these exchanges becomes part of the art and craft of teaching and the art and craft of equity. But responsibility rests with learners as well. Supporting the art and craft of teaching is also the art and

craft of learning. In Japanese classrooms, what teachers may miss, fellow students probably will not, and they bring their friends into the spheres of instruction. In this way, participants are at once teachers and learners. Instances of teaching by the teacher are interpreted and made accessible by peers. All kinds of teaching intentions need to be met by receptive learners who actively incorporate learning experiences. Proper relations should also nurture students and teachers who are adept at the art and craft of learning.

The art and craft of teaching and learning in Japan includes the view that education is a learning process involving mind and heart. The Japanese conception of *kokoro* aptly situates mind and heart, cognition and emotion, together. Thus, the teaching-learning process is not only one of making connections mind-to-mind but also heart-to-heart (*kizuna*). The beginning point, the means, and the ends of education are caring relationships: communicating with and developing *kokoro*.

Understanding education as a process is critical. School is not just the building but also the process—a shared phenomenon whose qualities are defined by and for those who congregate together each day. The classroom is not just a place bounded by four walls in which knowledge is transmitted; it is also a community of learners defined by their network of relations and extending beyond school walls. Teachers are not merely government servants mindlessly following curricular prescriptions; they react and interact with fellow teachers, students, and communities to effect lively teaching-learning processes. Teacher expertise is not just a matter of subject matter knowledge; teachers need consummate interpersonal skills, heightened sensibilities to tune into students' thoughts and feelings, and the ability to touch their souls, move their hearts, and inspire their bodies and minds. Students are not born with a given set of abilities that determine their eventual achievement; rather they have superb capabilities and

seemingly limitless capacity to learn, and in their efforts and in working with those around them, their abilities and achievements are born. Finally, students are not just immature versions of adults who need constant supervision and control; they can assume responsibilities and supervise and assess themselves and each other if only given the carefully crafted chance. Assessment modes that incorporate process values are necessary, and reflection as a mutual assessment mode focuses attention on the process in Japan.

My experience left me with several considerations and questions. Recalling rewarding learning experiences in my own life, they included variety in the three forms and elements of direct novel experiences and knowledge that moved my heart and involved my body as much as my mind. They did not occur without a sense of belonging to a community or without a sense of caring and commitment from teachers and peers. And the most memorable learning events were those that opened my heart to different ways of thinking and feeling.

Kokoro is an important concept to consider in education and in educational equity. The relational basics (four Cs and five *Ks*) may be the most central basic concerns. If in the end, open hearts have not prospered along with cognition, what have we ultimately accomplished? What kinds of human beings (*ningen*) will determine the kind of society we construct and the legacy we leave? In addition to our concerns for knowledge and learning in education, on the basis of this research experience, I will now ask the following questions to educators in any country:

1. What kinds of communities of learners have been developed, and are these consistent with the cultural values you wish to encourage?
2. What kinds of connectedness or relations exist, and are they the kind you wish to foster?

3. What kinds of commitment have been established, and are they built with the integrity and sincerity you hope to inspire?
4. What kinds of caring can you see, touch, and feel, and can you honestly say from your heart, not your intellect, that this is the kind of education respectful of knowledge and human dignity?

In the end, macro- or microlevel analyses aside, the impact of any set of policies, regulations, organizational structures, textbooks, or other educational strategies is always filtered through local practitioners. With their wisdom, sensitivity, and awareness, teachers skillfully maneuver from global or generalized policies to local circumstances, dealing with individual promise and predicaments. Through these individual instances, issues of individual growth and equity may be addressed quite artfully in admirable cases. For teachers, each success is measured by a student's name, not his or her number, and by the degree of pride taken in individual and collective accomplishments—a self- and group identity that hopefully will grow and last a lifetime. Taken together, these are the ultimate standards of equity and equality in education, and to the extent that teachers use their wisdom of practice to cultivate the relational basics with sensitive attention to inclusion and to whole-person education, they are the true heroes and heroines in education.

Notes

1. *Yobiko* are schools for full-time exam preparation studies. Those who attend are usually high school graduates who failed to pass the entrance examination into their desired university and are studying to take the examinations again. Some will study year after year until they are successful.

2. For a more complete discussion and literature review of the research on equity and equality of education, see Chapter 2 of my dissertation (N. Sato, 1991).
3. Moral education has a longstanding history and place, controversial at times, in Japanese schooling (see Fujita, 1989, p. 136; Hiroyuki Moritani, School of Education, Fukuoka University, has written on this topic). The content and purpose of moral education has changed depending on the dominant political ideologies of the times.
4. "Less desirable" is my terminology for the ways teachers explained their rotations to me. They seemed to be divided in terms of a geographic area (such as isolated mountain schools) or presumptions that students in those areas maybe less motivated or more difficult populations to teach (by minority or socioeconomic status). For example, Umi and Mori were divided into different groups, Mori being in the group that would tend to be less desirable. However, Mr. Ito and other teachers preferred Mori students and Mori styles to those of Umi, so "less desirable" is not a generalizable fact.
5. One friend reported that when he and his wife were released from the hospital with their newborn, the hospital staff said that if the adjustment was too overwhelming, they could bring the baby back anytime and the hospital would take care of the baby until they could adjust to their new family life together. Hospital stays after delivery tend to be much longer (1 to 2 weeks compared with the 1 to 2 days that U.S. hospitals and insurance companies demand).
6. Reports of problems surface in the media; see Greenlees, 1996; Young, 1993. More research on the pressure is being published: Bossy, 2000; Okano et al., 1999; Schoppa, 1991; Zeng, 1998.

7. Although this research project did not document the process, most mandates are not “imposed” without considerable input from all levels prior to decision making. Channels for soliciting feedback from different regions and workers are clearly established, though the degree of influence is less clear and would make an interesting policy implementation study.
8. Recall from Chapter 4 that teachers advance to the next grade level with their students, so they stay together for 2 or more years. In Tokyo, after the 2-year period, teachers usually switch grades again; for example, a second-, fourth-, or sixth-grade teacher may teach first, third, or fifth grades.
9. I remember being impressed when Mr. Ito met a teacher from a rural area of Japan and they instantly struck up a conversation by sharing their teaching strategies about a particular story in the fifth-grade language textbook.
10. I have not conducted an extensive survey, but teachers reported little exposure to the actual curriculum before teaching, and practice teaching is just 2 weeks on average, at most 1 month.
11. See note 14 in Chapter 2 regarding discriminated groups in Japan, including *hibakusha* and *burakumin*.
12. Recall from Chapter 2 that the fundamental emphasis on developing *ningen* (human being, “amidst people”) in Japanese elementary schools. And, at the core of *ningen* is *kokoro* (heart: spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical heart).

8
Conclusion

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> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs… and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.
>
> —Geertz, 1973, p. 5

Exploring Japanese education in public elementary schools is an intricate journey traversing many layers of complex, interlocking "webs of significance." At times this exploration was an arduous trek through endless details and at times it was a luxury cruise eagerly absorbing rays of interpretation, but always it was a treasure hunt for gems of understanding, "an interpretive one in search of meaning." To be able to best detect, decipher, and diagram the webs, long-term observation of the same setting was necessary. Gathering information from multiple perspectives enhanced the search for meaning and exposed further complexities that led to more substantive interpretations.

To better understand and appreciate Japanese education, the descriptive details contained in this book must be considered in their entirety, whereas specific elements may serve as catalysts for change or renewal anywhere. Even just an anecdote may captivate the mind and inspire an educational journey or simply warm the heart. This book began with several anecdotes encouraging us to imagine new conceptions of heart and togetherness.

Hopefully, readers can imagine, and through dialogue with others, discover and contribute their own gems in turn.

Thanks to the insightful, caring students, teachers, and parents who opened their hearts and minds to share their world, I discovered countless gems for understanding equity issues as summarized in Chapter 7. If I had to select the brightest gem, however, the *relational basics* stand out as the cornerstone of education—in fact of any teaching-learning situation. Attending to these basics is the foundation from which all other educational growth can occur; and in the end, these may also be the most prized outcome for which we are all accountable.

Individual and group growth, self- and peer development, rest on these relations. As such, regardless of class size, student relations as vehicles of teaching and learning are as vital as student-teacher relations. When characterized by sincere helping attitudes and behaviors, student relations are prominent teaching tools. And community building essentially becomes individual and group growth achieved through these relations.

True democratic community by definition is inclusive of all members and therefore genuine community building is equity. When relations are properly in place, the resulting webs of mutual obligation and assistance create an educational environment where teaching is learning, learning is teaching, and classroom management, adult and peer supervision, and cooperative learning are all part of the same process. As invisible authority, a process of caring, trusting relations, they occur in the act of reciprocal togetherness: where mutual assistance prevails and is automatic. In classrooms with optimal relations, these acts were not conceived as separate entities; instead, they were often obser- vationally inseparable. Supervision and management as authoritarian notions (needing external punishments or control) become largely unnecessary as they reside in the fluid teaching-

learning spheres of maximum inclusion and mutual assistance: matters of the heart.

In an educational context, the most consequential webs of significance are the webs of relations. On an individual level, *kokoro* (heart) is the essence, integrating all aspects of self. On an interpersonal level, connectedness, togetherness, *kizuna* (touching of the hearts), nested places of belonging, and empathy work for the advancement of learning in any area. The opening anecdotes in Chapter 1 illuminate phrases of the heart: to open it, to genuinely touch it, to understand with it, to calm it. All encompass a relation. In fact, where the quality of relations is high, nonverbal, indirect vehicles of teaching and learning—such as absorption, role modeling, entering through form, observation, and intuition—take on increasing power as effective educational tools. The more effective tools that are available, the more opportunities to educate and to be educated: teaching without teaching.

The terms coined in this book have the relational basics at their root: the four Cs (connectedness, community, caring, and commitment), the five *Ks* (*kankei*, relations; *kimochi*, feelings; *kuro*, hardship; *keiken*, experience; *kokoro*, heart), and on more organizational and institutional levels, the five Cs (consistency, continuity, congruence, complementarity, coherence). If educational growth is presumed to be an ever-changing process whose relations and contexts unleash fluid capacities, then certain American habits of mind regarding educational discourse and practice must be altered.

Two particular mindsets are notably absent in Japanese elementary school life and thought. One is the tendency to separate and categorize, to sort and label, especially dangerous when done by criteria not determined by those being labeled. Thankfully, due to human variability, categories and labels become meaningless in certain contexts, requiring fluid and multiple

measures to capture, and even more seriously, astute alterations when labels no longer fit. The other is the tendency toward dichotomous thinking or polarized debates that oversimplify issues, and worse, push decision making toward either end of the spectrum: a winner-take-all mentality, rather than appreciating the complexity of shades of gray, interacting features, and trade-offs involved in most educational choices. No panacea exists, so all policies, reforms, and decisions require nuanced, situated thought and flexibility for instantaneous revision in practice.

Simply put, each educational decision or reform impacts already established relations. Whether starting a new program or altering an existing one, significant relations may be altered, displaced, or renewed; tired, poisonous relations may be maintained or eschewed; and new relations may be carefully grown accordingly. All must be thoughtfully deliberated as part of the price of reform. Whether the call is for academic achievement, safe schools, community building, teacher professional development, or equity, this study's major discovery is that one thread connects them all: the profound role of the quality of relations in producing growth and in sustaining change, commitment, and renewal. And the overall quality of relations is determined by the daily moment-to-moment teaching-learning processes, attentive to those included, excluded, alienated, or connected.

8.1 Insights About Japanese Education

8.1a Educational Excellence Japanese-style: What Are the Basics?

At first, excellence in many forms referred to the apparent diversity of schools, classrooms, people, teaching practices, organization patterns, and learning activities, yet each maintained an engaging excellence.[1] However, in time I realized that amidst the diversity these settings and people shared

one core emphasis—the relational basics—that contributed to differing degrees of success depending on the quality of relations. For example, less emphasis and less value placed on a variety of representational forms at Umi seemed to influence less successful participation for all students, while more community activities and less public evaluation mechanisms seemed to facilitate inclusion of more students in the teaching-learning process at Mori. In one classroom in Osaka, students exhibited much less lively engagement and participation patterns, and student-teacher relations seemed strained. An absence of commitment and caring seemed reciprocal, and the sense of community was disrupted.

School programs that maximize equitable participation, engagement, and multiple means for students and teachers to get to know each other facilitate seamless relations that build strong communities. Taken together, they nurture motivation and dedication in the sense of mutual obligation created. In other words, the Japanese set of relational basics are presumed in order to accomplish "the basics" (the three *Rs*; see Chapter 4.10a). As such, they are the *basis* for the basics: developing the whole person, direct learning experiences for tapping our senses and refining diverse sensibilities, and attention to the five *Ks* and four Cs. No single area is sufficient as the alluring blend of forms and levels of interaction combine to produce the total effect.

The Japanese case casts new light on what is considered basic to education. My own conception of the basics was unusually broad before going to Japan, but the Japanese case pushed back the boundaries further still. Moreover, none of the delectable varieties in academic, artistic, musical, athletic, personal, spatial, and social skills are considered "frills" or "extra" in their definition of educational goals and priorities. In fact, the lack of terminology distinguishing "academic" from "nonacademic"

activities speaks volumes about their whole-person conception of the basics.

In the rhetoric of educational reform, of returning to “the basics,” and of specifying assessment modes, I want to add considerations of empathy, responsibility, perseverance, and inspiration. How can compassion and passion become top priorities in classrooms and in educational discourse in diverse settings throughout the world? Where do these conceptions fit in U.S. policy making? How can they be incorporated into our criteria for educational assessment? If educational debates expand to include these issues, the observed classrooms will have contributed greatly to education and to cross-cultural understanding.

The breadth of this study’s conceptual framework became a cogent means for investigating these basics and uncovering new relational avenues to explore, such as the roles of reflection, absorption, process orientation, invisible authority, aesthetics, intuition, and sensory awareness in learning. Educational excellence may not be quantifiable, but it is instantly detectable. Indeed, it may not be fully describable, yet genuine teaching and learning are contagious when they are happening, and one cannot wait to leave the classroom when they are not. As one adept American science educator, Doris Ash, explained to me, her goal is to introduce content in such a way that the urge to seek more information is “irresistible.” Learners become so intrigued with the problem or issue that they are compelled to do more research to find the answers or to change behaviors and attitudes to help others make progress. In some of the toughest conditions in Oakland, California and Louisville, Kentucky, I observed such learning as part of community-oriented reforms, such as Fostering a Community of Learners and the Child Development Project. Such moments are the pinnacles of teaching and learning that are educators’ greatest rewards. This sense of the

“irresistible” is palpable in exemplary classrooms and could be a powerful criterion for judging educational success. Like reading a good book that sparks the imagination and leaves a refreshed feeling, the urge is to want more. The same sense pervades effective professional development that stimulates the desire to return to a classroom immediately to try out a new idea. Every moment will not be rife with compassion or inspiration, but we know when we feel it: a touching of the hearts (*kizuna*).

8.1b Challenges for the Japanese

Despite plenty of praiseworthy elements, the Japanese still face numerous challenges. Several contradictions arose that pose complex problems:

- Curricular breadth vs. the narrow range of skills tapped by entrance examinations
- Role of free time and participation in school and community events vs. *juku* and pressures toward singular study for the tests beginning at earlier ages
- School sorting mechanism based on merit (examinations) vs. differential access to the means for succeeding on those examinations (primarily financial)
- Status inequality between schools vs. equality within schools
- Mainstream Japanese inclusion vs. exclusion for nonmainstream Japanese and minority populations in the same nexus of caring relations

These contradictions raise serious questions:

- What impact will their current quality of life (no playtime with friends, little free time) have on their future lifestyles and attitudes?
- Will they concern themselves with the status inequality?

- How can they accommodate the learners who are currently underserved?
- Can excellence in elementary teaching inform upper levels of their school system as a way to encourage creativity, engagement, and whole-person education?
- Can they strike a balance between education for the state and education for the individual?
- Decreased teacher autonomy, the burden of bureaucratic minutia, and respect for teachers may be unfortunate trends that deflate participation in teacher research groups. Yet these informal professional development mechanisms may be a hidden strength in their system. How can the informal teacher professional culture be encouraged?

To better understand the challenges for the Japanese, the challenge for Americans is to situate the terms and relations in the context of multiple Japanese perspectives. For example, the above questions are posed from my perspective as an American researcher concerned with equity, raised in a democracy founded on individual rights with a firm belief in individual determinism. Japan has emerged from quite different roots historically. Rather than a strong belief in individual determinism, Japanese have a deep respect for the power of nature and other forces over human conditions and for consideration of others as a priority above self-satisfaction, which is best reflected in their phrase "*sho ga nai*." This phrase signals an accommodation mechanism, a self-sacrifice made in order to adjust to a given situation rather than to attempt to change the situation for personal benefit. Overall, the locus of control rests more outside individual powers and beyond selfish attention. Their conception of individual rights is tempered by their conception of individual self as inextricably linked to one's web of relations with others. Significantly, though this structure

seems rigid at certain times and places, its adaptability at other times helps to maintain an institutional equilibrium. The freedom that allows for local and individual adaptation also allows "*sho ga nai*" to maintain its accommodating power.

Democracy is a fairly recent development founded upon centuries-old traditions cultivated in a closed centralized society with a rigid status hierarchy. Japanese tend to accept the structures of society and forms of learning as given, and work within the system to sculpt changes, find their individuality, and display creativity. Both the United States and Japan must struggle with the ongoing tensions between individual versus group rights, education for the individual versus education for the nation, and degree of freedom versus structure. Interestingly, the struggles are the same even though the countries stem from such different roots, so the possibilities for cross-cultural understanding and sharing become a fertile ground to illuminate issues and solutions for current educational reform concerns. For example, three recent concerns in Japan are individualizing instruction, promoting creativity, and internationalizing their educational system. Elementary programs on multicultural awareness and international understanding are weak (virtually nonexistent) in Japan. Japanese may learn from the United States in these areas. On the other hand, American educators have renewed interests in community building, setting high standards, accountability, and cooperative learning, so the Japanese case may prove instructive.

The individualizing vs. community-building duality represents an interesting convergence for both countries, which exposes tensions within the respective cultures. Coming from individual strengths, the United States is struggling with how to build community, and coming from community orientations, Japan is struggling with how to honor individualistic needs.

Both struggles are ongoing; they require never-ending attention to maintain the tantalizing balance that honors individual and group strengths.

Two troubling dichotomies need further examination at this point: that Japan is homogeneous, whereas the United States is heterogeneous; and that Japanese are group oriented, whereas Americans are individualistic. In given times and places, each individual maybe group oriented or individualistic; and homogeneity and heterogeneity exist both in the United States and Japan. Dichotomies are simple analytic tools sometimes based on kernels of truth, but in fact many more “truths” exist in the gradations between the polarized ends. The important issue is to be aware of whose and what standards are being used, and what criteria are applied to warrant such labeling.

For example, using race as a yardstick, assertions about relative homogeneity and heterogeneity in Japan and the United States are true. But race as a yardstick is born out of the U.S. experience, and within Japan other yardsticks exist that divide people with a severity of discriminatory measures rivaling the black-white experience in the United States. In most situations within Japan, the Japanese would never label themselves homogeneous, and despite being called group-oriented, they often disagree and avoid having to cooperate.

Though labels tend to remain static, they can lose their meaning in an instant. Hence, their validity is lost in the circumstances of time and place. In this way, such polarization actually serves more as a screen, preventing true understanding between peoples of differing cultural backgrounds, lifestlyes, and perspectives. In the end, I believe we would be more perceptive about each other if we could savor the finer distinctions and decipher who, how, when, where, and why individuals and/or groups in a society exhibit characteristics of both ends of a dichotomy rather than

finding security in simple generalities: “we” are one way and “they” are another way.

Group and individual orientations are essential in both cultures. They just differ in their appropriate avenues of expression: when and where one can speak frankly, when it is best to remain silent, when to go along with others, and when to stand alone. The Japanese have more times when established protocol and group conformity take precedence, such as in most public spheres, but Americans also follow protocol and relish group conformity: look to Hollywood, fashion, and sports for clear examples or consider the power of designer labels, cliques, and the notions of “insider” knowledge and whistle blowers.

An interesting topic for study is the degree to which community and group progress promote individual efficacy and learning, and at what point the same priority on community impedes individual efficacy and self-fulfillment. Japan may be strong in nurturing self-fulfillment that derives from group cohesion but consequently is weaker in nurturing self-fulfillment that emanates from individual expression. On the other hand, the United States may be stronger in developing the latter self-fulfillment but is weak in the former. The two sides can learn from each other to locate the satisfactory balance to maximize self-fulfillment of both kinds.

Joint examination may also inform two critical areas that both countries need to balance. One is the amount of structured and scheduled time compared with free time and playtime in order to maximize learning. The other is the amount of repetition and attention to form and order (freedom through structure) compared with totally free expression (freedom without structure) as a means to cultivate creativity. Other issues are perennial problems as well: class management, high standards for achievement, student discipline and responsibility, and curriculum coverage. Investigating

these issues with the relational basics and the five *Ks* in mind may be quite instructive across different cultural contexts, particularly given the serious rise in violence in our schools and society. Indeed, pondering various issues of increasing concern such as child abuse, road rage, teen suicide, violence, alcoholism, other self-destructive health concerns, and declining family values, a common thread may be the breakdown in *relations* that each signals. Focused sensitive attention to relations in education and elsewhere may not only bolster achievement outcomes but may enable healing and channel solutions in many of these areas as well. Collecting outstanding portraits of educational excellence around the world would be welcome and informative.

8.2 Implications for Contemporary Education: The United States and Japan

8.2a Lessons? New Visions?

In cross-cultural studies, the automatic assumption is that the lessons are what one country can learn from another, but that is an artificial duality in many ways, since learning lessons is multidirectional: between countries and within countries. Just as examining the individual level of analysis is a vital means for assessing equity and the art and craft of teaching and learning, lessons that the two countries may learn from each other may also be effected best at the individual level of experience: between practitioners. My sense is that bringing together Japanese and American practitioners for mutual discussions about curriculum and teaching would be tremendously exciting and enriching for professional development: an irresistible impetus for educational reform.

By comprehending the varied influences of historical roots, societal contexts, and notions of individual self, the puzzling notions of contrasting

images and contradictions (set forth in Chapter 1) yield to greater appreciation of how they work in complementary fashion. Therefore, the initial puzzles can be seen as ones "made in America," more due to *our* cultural dissonance rather than to *their* inconsistency. In fact, when we cease to see "contrasts" and "contradictions" and instead can explain them as complexities across a continuum of factors, our understanding has become more refined.

Although some contradictions and contrasts are easily explained by differences in past research methods, timing, levels of analysis, and disciplinary lenses, many contrasting images and contradictions are better understood by meticulously deciphering the underlying situational criteria stemming from Japanese perspectives. One example is the clear distinction they make between public surface appearance, or that which is made *explicit*, and private inside reality, or that which remains *implicit* (see Chapter 2). Japanese highly value implicit communication modes (to understand without being told, to find the answer without having to ask the questions), whereas Americans prize the explicit (speak up!). Silence may mean "no" rather than "okay." We need to read the silence.

Their appreciation of learning by entering through form is a wonderful embodiment of this duality, because the practical result of this philosophy is often seemingly endless repetition of certain tasks (beyond an American's point of tolerance) and rules that appear nonsensical. Yet as part of the outward, formal, structured compliance, a buildup of psychological tension and a deep-seated physical (whole-body) learning produces a depth and quality of learning with broader longer-term benefits: the repetitious drill leads the practitioner to more profound insights and provocative creative abilities in time.

The biggest myth I hope to dispel is that teaching and learning are somehow easier if the participants "look alike," or in common parlance with respect to Japan, are "homogeneous." A related myth is that one has to have the same conditions in order to learn from another or to be able to attempt the same kinds of teaching-learning strategies (U.S. research on tracking and on heterogeneous grouping counter this myth: see Cohen, 1994; Delany, 1986; Mehan, 1989; Oakes, 1990, 1992; NSSE, 1995). One American mindset is a tendency to dismiss an idea or practice because someone else's situation is different. After World War II, the Japanese managed to learn from the West and adapted American educational ideas to reinvent their own system even though the contrast in U.S.-Japan cultural and material conditions was greater then than it is today.

At the outset of this book, three puzzling notions teased my brain.[2] Yet an even more fascinating puzzle emerged during the research. When I asked teachers about the source of their educational philosophy that embraces such diversity and multiplicity in forms of learning, Mr. Ito simply said, "It's from you!" Surprised, I repeated curiously, "From us? Americans?" He chuckled at me and said, "Yes. It's Dewey. John Dewey. Don't you recognize his educational ideas?" Other American researchers have had similar experiences.[3] The nagging issue remains: Since many of these practices are derived from America's preeminent educational philosopher, John Dewey, why have the Japanese been able to activate his ideas more extensively?

Ironically, Japanese culture is a more hospitable environment for Dewey's ideas, particularly the prominence of the social aspects of teaching and learning that make the relational basics paramount. Because of this relational ideal, they have also retained an emphasis on experience, on process, on reflective activity, on an integration of our body, minds,

emotions, spirit, and will, rooted in our biological senses and human sensibilities. Although several generations ago American society more closely resembled and respected these aspects as well, somehow the Japanese remain more traditionally rooted. Or, again, perhaps their teachers remain rooted and therefore are their unsung heroes and heroines.

Just reading a few of Dewey's titles attests to the cultural consonance with Japan: *Art as Experience* (1934), *Experience and Education* (1938), "Nature, Life and Body-Mind" in *Experience and Nature* (1958), *Democracy and Education* (1916), and in *John Dewey on Education*: (Archambault, 1964) "Affective Thought in Logic and Painting," "Why Reflective Thinking Must Be an Educational Aim," "The Process and Product of Reflective Activity: Psychological Process and Logical Form," and "Interest in Relation to Training of the Will."

Dewey asserted, "I believe that… education, therefore, is a *process* of living and not a preparation for future living" (1897, reprinted in Archambault, 1964, p. 430) and "that under existing conditions far too much of the stimulus and control proceeds from the teachers, because of neglect of the idea of the school as *a form of social life*" (p. 432). Further, he believed "that the discipline of the school should proceed from the life of the school as a whole and not directly from the teacher" (p. 432).

From Dewey's beliefs, activities such as the clubs, student councils, welcome and good-bye parties, and ceremonies are valued as fundamental to that "process of living" and "school as a form of social life," with students performing those "activities which make civilization what it is." The "discipline of the school" begins with an inculcated self-discipline (*shitsuke*) and enters through the forms and structures of teaching and learning, which contagiously spreads via the interdependent groupings, empathy, mutual loyalty, and intricate webs of relations. Japanese translated

this philosophy into a program rich with direct experiences that mirror the adult world, complete with a process orientation, predominance of reflection, and valuing of effort and will above ability.

Devoid of situational context and educational aims, I cannot prescribe or identify lessons for others; rather each reader takes away his or her own. My goal is to provide thought-provoking visions, both good (to be admired) and bad (to be avoided). The only lessons I can accurately convey are those that I have learned and those I wish to learn more about. True educators are open to new ideas regardless of the source. We can still learn from John Dewey, from history, and from our own educational success and failure. Open hearts and minds are not constricted by national boundaries, historical precedent, or cultural contexts, and thanks to the Japanese, I found many aspects of their program quite irresistible.

As a result of this inquiry, my definition of educational excellence and educational equity has changed significantly. In addition to quantitative measures that predominate in the United States today, I am just as concerned with advancing the relational basics as a means to improve academic achievement. The Japanese case provides justification that a wide array of experiences that develop differing sensibilities is not only crucial but possible on the widespread basis demanded by my concerns with equity. And excellence? Children are much more capable than American conventional wisdom grants them. We expect too little.

Regarding curriculum and instruction, I am intrigued by the potential significance of exploring the relationship between heart, mind, and body in teaching-learning processes. Sensitive attention to the emotional side of cognition and the cognitive aspects of emotion contains equally fascinating implications for the ways we teach and learn and the ways we organize our schools and classrooms. A more complete understanding of absorption as a

process of teaching-learning may reveal critical “invisible” aspects of successful educational settings in many countries. How much do students get the answer without having to ask the question? How attuned can teachers and students become with one another so that a teacher may just posture himself or herself near some materials and the students ready themselves for action? Or the teacher sighs and students respond. Conversely, how much negative learning is absorbed when we lower our standards and accept mediocre work or dismiss irresponsible behaviors, or when we continue teaching academics while turning a blind eye to the powerful cliques and destructive relations teeming in the halls.

Another set of meaningful lessons may be derived from negative cases so that we learn from others’ mistakes. I did not observe many problem cases in this study, but one next step is to elaborate problematic issues and negative cases with similar detail. An overall picture is needed before true appreciation of the negative aspects is possible. The Japanese case, however, does raise many questions regarding tests as the predominant means of measuring the worth of students, teachers, and educational programs. As Horio (1988) reminds us, testing is a “one-dimensional value system.” Is it educationally wise to depend on assessment mechanisms that assess limited dimensions? An assessment menu with varied assessment modes is more inclusive, therefore more equitable and more educationally sound. At any rate, we should always be astute about what each assessment does and does not measure and what it really can and cannot tell us. Regardless of the assessment mode, the relational basics are effective only in tandem with high expectations and situated accountability and feedback that enable students and teachers to achieve truly lofty goals.

On a final note, the prospects of terrorism and the immediate, up-close coverage of unpredictable events, especially violent or unsettling ones,

make one message of this book even more compelling: the value of calm, connected hearts. Especially in times of uncertainty and unpredictable threats, whether experienced firsthand or via the media, a focus on educational processes that *calm* the heart and that ensure a *touching* of the hearts is imperative. The rapidity of on-line communication for receiving information and organizing responses to it also necessitates a degree of thoughtful, composed, genuine human connection of hearts to ensure that the actions taken are constructive rather than destructive, and thoughtful rather than thoughtless.

Developing calm, understanding hearts and cultivating intuitive relational skills are two of the most important missions of any educational system because they are the basis on which more profound and universal academic learning can be sustained. The abilities to focus, to persevere, and to care for the benefit of others rely on the degree of wholeness in person, calmness of heart, and of belonging to community. The ultimate educational goal is to *open* hearts: to new experiences and ways of thinking, to continued learning, and most importantly, to others. But before one can open one's heart in growthful, inclusive ways, the heart must be calm, whole, and secure.

Hence, schools need to be places that cultivate a sense of welcome belonging for each and every student: *connected* to others, to a cause for community, to an irresistable curiosity for learning about the world, and to the ability to take multiple perspectives. The secure sense of place for each individual can only happen where a diverse range of skills and interests are honored. Thus, now more than ever, what Americans have called "extra"-curricular activities become essential core components. Without the music, art, physical, or interpersonal activities that calm and connect whole persons, nervous, distracted energies overwhelm students and teachers to

promote destructive relations and distract from the desired academic endeavors. The less productive relations between peers, the less teaching-learning opportunities available, hence, less academic achievement may result. Any time spent in activities that enable students to focus, to connect to real time and place and to contribute to others' well-being and feeling good about themselves, will pay off in academic growth in the end. Now more than ever, we need a connection to nature, to others, to a whole sense of self in order to open our hearts and genuinely touch our hearts: learning for life.

8.2b Methodology—Future Research

From a research standpoint, this book represents an unprecedented collection of data from the same classrooms, while the interpretation rests on a multi-faceted interdisciplinary analysis with equity issues in mind. Since education is characterized by growth of continually acting and reacting minds, bodies, and hearts, educational research methods must encompass the multiplicity of processes, relations, situational meaning, multiple viewpoints, interacting layers, and *honne* (true inside feelings and views). An elaborate, richly contextualized description of fifth-sixth-grade classrooms invites new interpretations of past generalizations, statistics, and publications regarding Japanese education.[4]

Ethnographic techniques are especially appropriate in Japan due to the way they spin their webs of significance. In settings where sensory awareness and development are accorded significance, sensory methods are essential. Where implicit understanding and nonverbal communication are prized, so, too, are nonverbal implicit methods. Where the centrality of relations and long-term interactional processes are integral elements in teaching-learning events, long-term methods that can convey these processes are necessary. To capture whole-person development, whole

methods are needed. When the all-important construction of meaning occurs in interaction, then that is where the researcher must be.

Just being there is insufficient; one needs to develop sensibilities to dependably construe the participants' intentions. In Japan, this meant I needed to develop my eyes to distinguish an aesthetic pattern from a trivial uniformity; to develop my ears to distinguish the din of disruption from the delight of discovery; to develop my absorption powers to construe implicit meaning and feelings from explicit actions and words. Just as the Eskimos have over 50 words for *snow*, the Japanese express innumerable messages through silence. I needed to know when a pat on the back meant "do your best," or "don't worry," or "hey, look what you're doing," or simply a sympathetic gesture, "I understand." These same sensibilities are exactly those needed for the art and craft of teaching and are exhibited by excellent teachers everywhere.

When teaching-learning capitalizes on absorption, role modeling, and other more subtle and indirect cues, the resulting educational processes take on different forms, often making them more efficient and smooth: a transition is indicated by a mere change in posture, a warning is heralded by a glance, and a plea for assistance is denoted by a pause. Some of the most captivating aspects of Japanese classroom life are areas that defy quantifying or reporting on survey questionnaires: the engagement, the lively humor, emotional unity of pivotal events, breathtaking choral singing, and even the touching instances of students moved to tears by teasing but just as instantaneously comforted by friends rallying to their side.

These sides of the educational story cannot rely solely on numbers. Aggregating numbers sometimes gives a false sameness to very different experiences and explanations for various participants, denying their perspective and voice. Quantifying some elements may mask their true

significance. Both approaches are necessary and complement each other. But to assess utility or extract lessons, any numbers and descriptions must be sufficiently detailed to have situated processes in their “webs of significance” (Geertz, 1973).

Some secrets to effective teaching-learning occur so spontaneously and unconsciously on the part of the participants that the outside observers role is essential. From a practical standpoint, teachers serve as creative intermediaries of the standardized curriculum. They can sculpt the curriculum to construct quite different educational experiences in classrooms sitting side by side. And, in the unpredictable classroom arena, the complex interaction of spheres of instruction produces further variance that impacts eventual achievement and equity. Thus, the experienced curriculum is an indispensable arena for evaluating what Japanese schooling and its impact really are. “Real time” is not spent as the mandated and posted time schedules indicate. Any classroom teacher knows that a characteristic feature of the job is reacting to unplanned interruptions and detours from the regularly posted schedule. To keep track of real time, I had to attend all day every day.

The findings offer fresh insights into Japanese society and education, teaching-learning processes, equity, and classroom life. With contrasting notions of self, child rearing, cognition, ability, and authority and control, the Japanese case presents limitless opportunities to reexamine our language (labels and terms), concepts, hypotheses, theories, and ways of thinking about self and learning. Ideas and practices that rest comfortably in one framework invite challenge when set in another framework. For instance, what is the impact of universal ownership of educational materials and of universal participation guaranteed as a right of membership in the classroom community, not as a privilege determined by adults? Further,

how does undifferentiated participation[5] influence student access to learning? What are the most effective combinations of intellectual, representational, and social forms for increasing achievement for the most students? In order to provide for such variety, what degree of standardization is necessary, and at what costs? What enables standardization to remain equitable and engaging? How can caring relations work alongside values placed on hardship, self-reliance, painful struggles, and a hard work ethic to stretch our capacities and to reach beyond our presumed abilities? Or simply, how do absorption, reflection, entering through form, enjoyment, play, and *taiken* impact cognitive development at various ages?

The fact that seemingly opposing ideas (in Western thought) can formulate complementary processes that enhance education in Japan raises thought-provoking ideas: for instance, helping others learn as a means to teach oneself; nonacademic emphases to increase academic achievement; patience with mindless wandering one instant in order to solicit mindful hard work the next; and some standardized repetition as a means to increase diversity and individually creative spin-offs. Consider, too, the equivalent strengths of teaching by teaching and teaching without teaching. A host of tools enable teaching without teaching: for instance, personal habits (*shitsuke*), mutual empathy, responsibility, consistent expectations, and the emphasis on form and order for internalizing the basics that build self-discipline and inspire mindful epiphanies.

Without an overview of the whole process, discrete elements may be misunderstood. For example, teaching to the whole group in one area only works because attention to individuals is carefully orchestrated in other areas. Thus, times when group or individual expression are allowed are important to discern; the appearance of homogeneous values and ideas in

public arenas cannot be understood without recognizing the heterogeneity of values and opinions expressed in private arenas. In Chapter 1, I mentioned an Escher metaphor: where judging equity issues involves focusing alternatively on black and white sides and discerning the transitions from one to the other. Similarly, many successful educational practices rely on the interface between seemingly opposing sides, dancing on the edges to craft the educable moment. For example, the interplay between noise and silence, attention and neglect, and standardization and diversity require skillful maneuvering to effect the art and craft of teaching and equity. Fun and laughter go hand in hand with hard work and struggle; lighthearted spontaneity precedes disciplined thought; and noise and active bodies release the ability to concentrate.

The teacher decides when to allow students to be rowdy and noisy in exchange for quiet concentration and when to allow individual expression in return for group compliance. A fine line exists between individual expression that builds self-confidence and when that expression crosses over into self-centeredness. A delicate balance exists between self-assertion and group dynamics. Similarly, delegation of authority requires artful timing between purposeful lack of intervention in order to encourage peer and self-supervision skills, responsibility, and leadership along with tactful intervention when leadership becomes too coercive or inequitable.

When does the consistency and security of standardization that promotes learning opportunities cross the fine line into boredom or limited visions that inhibit learning opportunities? At what point does standardization dissipate into meaningless diversity, and conversely, when enriching diversity depends on standardization. When and where is uniformity diverse and when and where is diversity uniform? At what point does inclusion in all activities lead to exclusion from the educational dialogue because one

cannot keep up? And at what point does exclusion (for special assistance) help secure eventual inclusion, or conversely, cement exclusion forever? How to respond to instances of neglect or disadvantage yet maintain the standard of equality and sense of equal involvement in community is critical.

Sometimes the goal is to strike a balance, and sometimes a balance is impossible to strike. Ongoing tensions must be dealt with alongside ongoing losses with the gains. Again, in the end, the awareness of who is losing and who is gaining is necessary for eventually striking a balance overall. With more information, we get smarter about gradations: variations within dichotomies and generalizations. The black box of schooling is filled with gray matters of all kinds.

In accomplishing a successful balance and traversing the fine lines, the art and craft of providing equity is exercised. Depicting this art and craft requires a methodology attuned to the processes and sensibilities that the art and craft entails. What webs of significance have been spun by and for students? Which webs of significance include and exclude peers in the spheres of instruction? How firm or fragile are these webs? Are they connected or fragmented?

As a means of studying equity concerns, the conceptual framework presents a compelling way to add the individual level of analysis into the equity research framework. For instance, this study reinforces U.S. work elaborating multiple intelligences and recognizing the situational nature of cognition and learning, especially regarding learning tasks as social, cultural situations. The notions of distributed intelligence and humanizing and nurturing intelligence are finely elaborated in the Japanese context in multiple ways that enhance learning for a great majority of students. Considering their different conception of human abilities, cross-cultural

studies in that and in other educational psychology fields, such as motivation and attribution theory, may be promising (Azuma, 1994; Hatano, 1991, 1994; Inagaki, 1984, 1994, 1995; Kashiwagi, 1984, 2001; Miyashita, 1994).

This study also lends support to endeavors in educational sociology, such as cooperative learning research. For example, Elizabeth Cohens (1986) longstanding work on complex instruction specifies ways of organizing heterogeneous classrooms for cooperative work that mirror those that occur naturally in Japan. This finding is exciting because although the precise manner of improving class participation and relations is different due to contrasting situational, cultural contexts, the possibility of reinforcing each other's ideas is not precluded by cultural differences or homogeneous versus heterogeneous populations. In another vein, if the notion of interacting spheres of learning depicts a more accurate reflection of the symphony of classroom learning dialogues, monologues, and mayhem, U.S. researchers may rethink their definitions of whole group, small group, and individual seat work.

Already strong lines of research about democratizing schools, national identity, and citizenship education exist in the United States and Japan, and they could benefit from more cross-cultural sharing. For example, Gross and Zeleny (1958) have long argued for organizing schools in a more democratic fashion, since social studies lessons on citizenship and U.S. history should emphasize the participatory democratic process. As Dewey reminds us, "I believe that the school is primarily a social institution. Education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life… that will be most effective in bringing the child to share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own powers for social ends" (1897, reprinted in Archambault, 1964, p. 430). Japanese schools are

organized more democratically as students and teachers share a broad range of responsibilities in school operations and governance.

One major weakness of this study is not including an extensive examination of Japanese educational research literature. The original reason is that most educational researchers in Japan do not conduct systematic classroom observation in natural settings. But this study's findings raise fascinating questions that warrant investigation into Japanese theories of pedagogy, intelligence and human abilities, nonverbal processes of instruction, the role of reflection and self-evaluation, and classroom management, to name a few. Several researchers are engaged in thoughtful work that has not yet been translated into English (Hiroshi Azuma, Giyo Hatano, Tadahiko Inagaki, Yasuhiro Ito, Keiko Kashiwagi, Takahiro Miyashita, Akira Sakai, Manabu Sato).

Joint research with Japanese classroom researchers would greatly inform U.S. educational research efforts; however, few Japanese educational researchers do classroom research in natural settings (T. Inagaki and M. Sato are exceptions), and no long-term ethnography has been conducted. Due to limited access to Japanese schools accorded to Japanese educational scholars,[6] and due to limited access of foreign scholars by virtue of language, time, and other cultural barriers, future studies with Japanese and Americans as co-observers would be particularly fruitful and informative. American exposure to more Japanese perspectives would be invaluable, and conversely, ethnography would enrich Japanese research efforts. Hence, another challenge is to encourage ethnographic methods in Japanese educational research, or at the very least, to generate more classroom research and mutual dialogues between university and teacher researchers in Japan and the United States.

As an exploratory study, this represents a beginning step in detailing what intellectual, representational, and social forms look like and how they enhance or hinder teaching and learning. This inquiry provides a substantial step forward, yet it is only a fraction of the information needed to warrant any generalized conclusions. Cause-effect assertions cannot be verified without much more systematic research. Grounded definitions and grounded theory building (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) enable comprehensive portraits of actual educational practices. As a theoretical treasure hunt, further study for operationalization and refinement of these forms in other classrooms, schools, institutions, and countries would be informative. By initiating fruitful dialogues between practitioners everywhere, the end result maybe change and reform, or it maybe reconfirmation and continuity. In either case, the challenge of thoughtful reexamination and reflection brings healthy renewal; the process is useful, productive, and educative.

One truly informative aspect of the Japanese approach to education and educational reform is a greater appreciation of the amount of time that teaching-learning takes, along with a patience for letting individuals work through the process, mistakes and all. In general, a major educational reform winds through a 5- to 10-year introduction and trial period before requiring all schools and teachers to implement the changes. The trial period allows for ample participation by teachers to create and try out new curriculum ideas and subsequently conduct massive professional development workshops to systematically introduce the ideas to teachers throughout Japan. Americans demand instant change and expect immediate compliance with each new policy or reform. They may also expect measurable results within a year, and in the worse cases, they do not even pay attention to whether the material or human resources were ever provided to attempt the proposed changes, let alone enact them in intended

ways. No aspect of education is more affected by this sense of immediacy, lack of material and human support, and lack of appreciation of time and process than that of community building.

8.3 Education and Community

8.3a On Community

To be able to attend elementary school classes daily for 10 months and never be bored, to gain strength and enthusiasm rather than to be sapped of energy, is a testament to the fun and the value of the educational experience I attained in becoming part of the school family in Japan. *Community* drew me daily to school filled with excited anticipation. This kind of community made going to school irresistible. This feeling for each student and teacher may be the ultimate facet that assessment should probe for accountability. As Dewey said, “I believe that… much of present education fails because it neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life” (1897, reprinted in Archambault, 1964, p. 431). Applicable to any country, community life encompasses individual and state concerns, mainstream and nonmainstream ethnicities, and requires constant attention to the quality of relations that honor each voice and in the end touch each heart.

Regarding education as community building, Dewey’s words still resonate. From this book’s research data, another book could be written illustrating Dewey’s ideas with the Japanese equivalents in practice. The areas most revealing are his thoughts on education as a social process—in effect, his emphases on social relations and community. Selected quotes from “My Pedagogic Creed” (1897, reprinted in Archambault, 1964) provide a nice illustration:

> **I believe that…** the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself. Through these demands he is stimulated to act as a member of a unity, to emerge from his original narrowness of action and feeling, and to conceive of himself from the standpoint of the welfare of the group to which he belongs, (p. 427)

One can see here the source of the Japanese focus on the relational basics, especially the four Cs and five *Ks*, and organizing the classroom around reflection, interdependent roles and responsibilities, and daily class meetings. Similarly, Dewey wrote, "I believe that … the moral education centers upon this conception of the school as a mode of social life, that the best and deepest moral training is precisely that which one gets through having to *enter into proper relations with others in a unity of work and thought*" (1897, reprinted in Archambault, 1964, p. 431 [emphasis added]); recall the most common slogans in Japanese elementary schools: *chikara o awasete* (combine our strengths) and *kokoro o hitotsu* (unify our hearts).

8.3b School as a Social Process: Complexities of Constructing Community

The 1980s and 1990s produced much U.S. educational research and reforms that recognize the value, even necessity, of community building. In fact, the ideas of building community for students in their learning environments, for teachers in their professional environments, and for workers in other fields and occupations have gained increasing popularity. Yet what is really meant by community and an intricate understanding of how to foster community within our schools and classrooms remains an elusive journey and destination.

In part, this is due to a different notion of community than has been traditionally conceived and researched in past studies in anthropology and sociology. And in part the language also reflects a considerable change in the unit of analysis. From the traditionally conceived broader geographic

notion of community, as in school-community relations, the more recent educational references to professional communities, communities of practice, and communities of learners are bounded by a more micro-organizational context—that of the classroom, school, or professional networks of teachers (Brown et al., 1993; Child Development Project, 1994; Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1997; Cohen, 1994; Lave, 1991; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1994).

The inescapable and invaluable role of community in education has long been recognized (Dewey, 1897, 1916, 1938; Bellah, 1985; Bruner, 1990, 1996; J. Gardner, 1990, 1996; Putnam, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). John Gardner set forth fundamental considerations for creating community, such as the tensions between individual and group needs, the interacting pressures of rights and obligations, and honoring diversity amidst shared beliefs. How these ideas come to life in the day-to-day turmoil in today's schools comprises the key arena as demonstrated by the Japanese case. A rich anthropological literature examining diverse cultural perspectives on what it means to "do school" (Au, 1991; Delpit, 1995; Erickson, 1984; Grantham-Campbell, 1998, 2003; Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; McDermott, 1977; Ogbu, 1990, 1992; Rogoff, 2001; Spindler, 1988) reminds us that the same community looks and feels differently depending on a person's background, position, and relative inclusion in that community.

One primary value of cross-cultural research is the new insights and broader perspectives generated by contrasting cultures, institutions, and organizational arrangements. The Japanese case provides a fascinating comparative opportunity to explore community building for three reasons. First, teachers and schools are situated in a different institutional context with tighter bureaucratic controls, yet through varied professional groupings

on the local level, teacher learning and curricular adaptations can thrive. Second, regardless of the premium placed on group harmony and self-sacrifice, building community for teachers and for students is a daily struggle, requiring constant nurturing, time, and attention, even in the Japanese context. And third, the long-existing practices and emphases on community building at all the levels in the system in Japan provide a wider perspective on the advantages and disadvantages that community brings both to individuals and to the system and the potential trade-offs to ponder.

While all kinds of community are vital and essential to nurture the kinds of lifelong student and adult learning needed in today's world of global interdependence, this book focuses on the basic building blocks of these notions: connectedness and belonging, nurtured or denied depending on individual participation and experiences, set in a web of daily relations. Indeed, a true community secures its reality in the moment-to-moment processes of engagement and interaction, always framed by a context of cultural and organizational structures, conditions, and norms. Two approaches can greatly enhance our appreciation of and knowledge about community, its advantages and disadvantages, as well as how to accomplish it in meaningful ways: (1) combining multiple theoretical perspectives and (2) comparative research.

Several theoretical perspectives and lines of inquiry emphasize the role of community for generative learning: psychological learning theory (Brown & Campione, 1996; Bruner, 1990, 1996; Solomon, Schaps, Battistich, & Watson, 1990, 1992), anthropological theory (Heath, 1995; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1994, 2001; Ogbu, 1990, 1992), organizational theory (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2000; Royal & Rossi, 1996), and political science (Gardner, 1990, 1996). These represent an interesting convergence of three lines of theoretical work that underscore the intricate

conditions essential for building true learning communities. Ironically, the historical evolution of studies in anthropology, sociology, and organizational theory has moved from larger units (whole societies, cultures, and organizations) to include smaller, more focused units (subcultures, classrooms, "up-close" communities), while psychology has moved from a sole focus on individuals engaged in decontextualized activities, often in laboratory settings, to include the importance of social interaction in daily life contexts.

Two major sources of work on the importance of community in U.S. education are informative: one is student focused, particularly embodied in specific school reforms aimed at community building in classrooms and schools,[7] while the other is teacher-focused, primarily looking at teacher collegiality and professional networks as a means to enable teachers to develop new approaches to teaching and learning (Britton, Paine et al., 2003; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman, 1990; Little, 1982; Talbert, 1993). While most can specify certain features of strong community building, the less well-developed aspects of the current work lay in a more thorough articulation of the layered and nuanced processes that create, nurture, and sustain these desired forms of community.

This book suggests that integrating the above work, along with more detailed descriptions of daily classroom life in several cultures, will create a more fully elaborated understanding of community building and its necessary corollary of connectedness for each learner on multiple levels. For example, many of the elements contributing successfully to student and teacher learning in the Japanese cases are ironically articulated nicely in Brown and Campiones *First Principles of Learning* (1996), yet few Japanese teachers, administrators, and students have encountered their work. These principles include (1) systems and purposive cycles; (2)

metacognitive environment; (3) discourse community; (4) deep content knowledge; (5) distributed expertise; (6) authentic instruction and assessment; and (7) learning community (Brown and Campione, 1975).

Community in its broadest conceptualization relies on nested levels of community, each carefully crafted from the diverse individual, interpersonal, and organizational conditions at hand. We need to better comprehend how each level is nurtured and sustained along with its interconnectedness, beginning with the individuals and their successively broader context of relations, up through organizational and societal levels. Their most valuable contribution is for instilling lifelong learning, individual and institutional. Communities can serve as the vehicles for producing the generative learning environments necessary for continual renewal and growth at all levels of our educational system.

Three key aspects must be explored in order to effectively utilize community building as an essential organizational, interpersonal, and individual foundation to maximize educational outcomes. First, whatever the disciplinary level of analysis, the most vexing struggle is the need for individual self-sacrifice in return for longer-term group or other benefits. Communities need constant attention to short-term losses for some members in return for longer-term guarantees of greater benefits or gains. Second, the nature of the reciprocal relationship between professional communities as generative arenas of learning and growth for teachers and adults, who in turn enhance community building as a primary vehicle for generative learning for students, must be better understood. And third, as Dewey emphasized, the notion of strong communities is crucial both as the source of education for the child as well as the means and ends for education: “The teachers place and work in the school is to be interpreted from this same basis. The teacher is not in the school to impose certain

ideas or to form certain habits in the child, but is there as a member of the community to select the influences which shall affect the child and to assist him properly in responding to these influences" (1897, reprinted in Archambault, 1964, p. 432).

Throughout this book, I have emphasized the positive aspects of the Japanese elementary school experience because my overall impression and personal discovery was that of inspiration. The best proof is that despite the 2-hour commute on three train lines and a bus ride to go to school, Monday through Saturday, 8 or 9 hours a day, and despite the fact that I would be completely exhausted and not feel like leaving the comforts of home at 6 a.m., when I approached the school and could hear the distant din of student laughter and yelling, my pace quickened, my shoulders lifted, and my face began to beam. I reached the door energized, and with the first students noticing me, waving their hands and shouting my name, I knew I belonged. I knew I was happy. I knew there was no place I would rather be than in this school, with these students, and learning with their teachers. I thought, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if all schools in Japan could be like this? Wouldn't it be wonderful if all schools in the United States could be like this? And wouldn't it be wonderful if all students everywhere could *feel* like this?"

Yet in the day-to-day reality of life, not all students feel this way, and no single student feels this way all the time. Educational costs must be considered along with educational gains. The quality of any assessment or assertions rests with the quality of the knowledge base, and in this regard much more thorough description, insights, and participant perspectives to further elaborate the gray matter of schooling are needed. Just as educational research into any country's education system is an interpretive one in search of meaning, daily classroom life for each individual is a

similar journey: an interpretive one in search of meaning while each individual is "suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun." In the latter case, teachers and learners share joint responsibilities for enlightening each other's interpretive search for meaning. The observed Japanese participants embellished this study's search with innumerable insights. I am forever indebted to the teachers, students, parents, administrators, and Japanese educators who not only gave meaning to my search but also energized and inspired me along the way.

From them I learned that the most important webs of significance we have spun are our webs of relations. Through these relations, the most vital educational experiences are those imbued with the five *Ks* (*kankei*, relations; *kimochi*, feelings; *kuro*, hardship; *keiken*, experience; *kokoro*, heart). In sum, this book is the story of a group of Japanese educators, parents, and students who touched my heart. In that *kizuna* (touching of the hearts), they were all my teachers. Ironically, in my search for data to write about Japanese education, I received from them the most profound education for myself. This story is their story.

Notes

1. *Engaging excellence* refers to high-quality achievement in diverse educational goals for most, preferably all, students as they participate in a friendly, enjoyable, responsible, and motivated classroom community.
2. The puzzles are (1) educational excellence exists in many forms even within the framework of a standardized curriculum and centralized control; (2) understanding the numerous contrasting images and contradictions between the images and the reality of Japanese

classrooms; and (3) seemingly opposing ideas form complementary processes to complete an educational whole.

3. I am thankful to Catherine Lewis for bringing this up in one of our conversations.
4. Japanese schooling is too broad and diverse to capture, let alone Japanese education. I question the utility of this level of generalized description except as a beginning framework for understanding the underlying complexity.
5. *Undifferentiated* refers to multiability groupings, no labeling or categorizing students by ability or achievement level, guaranteed progression through grades by age regardless of achievement level, and determining roles, responsibilities, and grouping patterns by rotation or by lot.
6. Ironically, I was able to secure such long-term, in-depth, daily access, because as a foreigner who would return to the United States and write in English, my presence was not as threatening.
7. For example, Ann Brown and Joe Campione, Fostering a Community of Learners (FCL); John Bruer, et al., Schools for Thought (SFT); Eric Schaps, Child Development Project (CDP); James Comer, School Development Program; Theodore Sizer, Coalition of Essential Schools; Elizabeth Cohen, Complex Instruction, to name a few. See bibliography citations for their work.

A
School Calendars

Month	Mori	Umi
April	Open School Ceremony	Open School Ceremony
	Entrance Ceremony	Entrance Ceremony
	Health Examinations	Safety/Emergency Drills
	School Picnic	Parent Observation Dental Examinations
May	Sports Day	School Picnic
	Health Examinations	Health Examinations
		Achievement and IQ Tests
June	Home Visits	Home Visits
	Swimming Instruction	Swimming Instruction
	Music Appreciation Day (6th grade)	“Outdoor Classroom” (3-day overnight—6th grade)
	Theater Day (6th grade)	Safety Instruction
July	Swimming Instruction	Swimming Instruction
	Camping Trip (5th grade)	Camping Trip (5th grade)
	Close Trimester Ceremony	Close Trimester Ceremony
August	Summer Vacation	Summer Vacation
	Swimming Instruction	Swimming Instruction

Month	Mori	Umi
September	District Swim Meet (6th grade)	District Swim Meet (6th grade)
	Open Trimester Ceremony	Open Trimester Ceremony
	Safety/Emergency Drill	Safety/Emergency Drill
	“Outdoor Classroom” (3-day	Parent Observation Day
	overnight—6th grade)	Sports Day
October	District Track Meet (6th grade)	District Track Meet (6th grade)
	Sunday Parent Observation Day	Science Field Trip Community Festival
November	Social Studies Field Trip	Health Consultation
	Health Exams Music Festival	Art Exhibition
December	Health Consultation	Music Appreciation (5th grade)
	Whole-School Cleaning	Whole-School Cleaning
	Close Trimester Ceremony	Close Trimester Ceremony
January	Open Trimester Ceremony	Open Trimester Ceremony
	Calligraphy Exhibition (to open the New Year, all grades)	Calligraphy Exhibition (to open the New Year, all grades)
	Stilts Sports Day	Health Exams Parent Observation Day
February	Parent Meeting for New	Parent Meeting for New

Month	Mori	Umi
	Parents (incoming 1st grade)	Parents (incoming 1st grade)
		Social Studies Field Trip Clubs Presentation Day
March	Giving Thanks Ceremony	Graduation Picnic (6th grade)
	Good-bye Party	Giving Thanks Ceremony
	Ball Games Day (5th-6th grade)	Good-bye Party
	Close Trimester Ceremony	Close Trimester Ceremony
	Graduation Ceremony	Graduation Ceremony

B
Research Instruments

The instruments included in Appendix B are translated versions of the actual instruments. More spaces were allowed between questions on the actual surveys to allow room for open-ended responses. Relevant research instruments are presented in the following order:

1. Student Survey #1: Background Information
2. Student Survey #2: Time-Use Chart
3. Student Survey #3: Friends
4. Student Survey #4: Personal Information
5. Student Survey #5: Play and Television
6. Student Survey #6: Rewards and Punishments
7. Student Survey #7: “Equality” Survey, School Opinion Survey
8. Student Interview
9. Teacher Survey
10. Parent Survey

1 Student Survey #1: Background Information

Your Age:_____ Sex: male female

I have been at_____ School since_____grade.

1. How many brothers and sisters do you have?
   Please list the ages of your brothers and sisters: Brothers:
   Sisters:

2. Who lives with you at home?
3. What job does your father do? Your mother?
4. Did you go to nursery school?
   to kindergarten? [public elementary school starts in first grade in Japan]

   What do you like most about school?
   What do you like least about school?
   If you could change something about school, what would you change?
   What is a “good student”? Please list 5 characteristics in the spaces below. Then rate yourself according to those characteristics:

   (1 = Good or always, 5 = bad or never)

1.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	1	2	3	4	5

   What are your strong points?
   What would you like to improve about yourself?
   What are your hobbies?
   What do you do after school?
   (approximately)—and with whom?
   If you watch television,
   how many hours per day?_____
   If you study, how many hours per day?_____
   If you play computer games,

how many hours per day?_____

If you play outside,

how many hours per day?_____

If you play inside your house,

how many hours per day?_____

Do you attend *juku*?

If you answered “yes,” what type of *juku* do you attend?

Each week, how many times do you go? Each time, how many hours is it?

Type of *Juku*	No. of times/week	No. of hours each time	How many years have you been attending?

Please number the following subjects in order of preference:

	1 = favorite to 9 = least favorite
music	1.
calligraphy	2.
math	3.
physical education	4.
art	5.
social studies	6.
science	7.
Japanese	8.
home economics	9.

Please draw a picture of the place where you study at home:

What kind of rooms are there in your home?

2 Student Survey #2. Time-Use Chart

I. Recently, in America people have become interested in how elementary students use their time outside school. I would also like to know what Japanese elementary students do with their time outside school. Please think of an average week and fill in approximately what you do each day. If you go to *juku*, any kind of lessons, or sports practice, please describe it precisely.

		Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
Wake-up time?	5:00							
Breakfast?	6:00							
	7:00							
Leave for	8:00							
school?	9:00							
	10:00							
	11:00							
	12:00							
Afternoon?	1:00							
	2:00							
	3:00							
	4:00							
	5:00							
Dinner time?	6:00							
	7:00							
	8:00							
	9:00							
Bedtime?	10:00							
	11:00							
	12:00							

II. Summer Vacation Plans: What Will You Do This Summer?

(Please list how many days or hours per day)

1. Travel? Yes No If yes, where? ( )
2. Summer school? Yes No If yes, what subjects? ( )
3. Play? Yes No If yes, what kinds? ( )
4. Sports? Yes No If yes, what kinds? ( )
5. Study at home? Yes No If yes, what kind of study? ( )
6. Other: (e.g., Scouts, Camp, etc.):_____( )

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

3 Student Survey #3: Friends

1. In your classroom, who are your best friends?_____, _____
2. When you walk home from school, with whom do you walk?
3. In your classroom, who is the best at or who is most:

	boy	girl
• studying		
• cheerful		
• interesting, funny		
• being able to do anything		
• athletic		
• considerate		
• being a leader		
• kind, gentle		
• thinking from another's viewpoint		
• being able to make friends		
• completing their work		

4. In your classroom, who is best at:

	boy	girl
• writing		
• sports		
• music		
• art, drawing		
• thinking		
• playing games		
• crafts		
• math, numbers		
• science		
• social studies		
• reading books		

5. If there are some studies you do not understand, whom would you ask for help?
   in social studies:_____ in Japanese:_____
   in science:_____in mathematics:_____
6. If you could only invite five people to a party, whom would you invite from this class?
7. If you had some troubles or problems, whom would you consult in this class?

4 Student Survey #4: Personal Information

1. Your favorite subject:
2. Your hobbies:
3. What do you like to collect?
4. What are you good at?
5. What would you like to be when you grow up?
6. What are your favorite sports?
7. What do you like to eat?

8. If you donated something, please let me know what age you used it and tell me any interesting or important information about it:

5 Student Survey #5: Play and Television

Thank you very much for all your answers on previous questionnaires. Many of you listed many hours of playing and watching television. I also played and watched much television in elementary school, but I probably played and watched different things than you do. Please let me know the kinds of games you play and the television programs you watch in the spaces below:

Play:

Television Programs:

Name	Channel	What day?	What time?

6 Student Survey #6: Rewards and Punishments

1. Do you receive rewards or punishments for your studies? Yes: No:
   A. For example, when you do well on: what kinds of *rewards* do you receive?

When I do well on . . .	from parents	from teachers
homework		
test scores		
report card		
sports day, cultural festival, etc.		
other:		

   B. When you do not do well on: what kinds of *punishments* do you receive?

When I do not do well on . . .	from parents	from teachers
homework		
test scores		
report card		
sports day, cultural festival, etc.		
other:		

7 Student Survey #7: “Equality” Survey, School Opinion Survey

These past months have been very interesting, fun times for me. I will soon return to America, and thanks to everyone, I will return with a much warmer heart. I think Japanese teachers and students are wonderful. Finally, this is the last questionnaire. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. If a new classmate asked, “What kind of school is the___School?” what would you tell them?
2. If someone asked, “What kind of students go to your school?” what would you say?
3. “Equality of educational opportunity” is an important principle in both the United States and Japan. In your school experience,
   What parts of school life are “equal”? What parts are “unequal”?

1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

What parts of school life are “fair”? What parts are “unfair”?

1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

4. What is the most memorable thing about your elementary school experience?

   Thank you very much for all your cooperation in so many ways. Please study English very hard in middle school and please come to visit me in America.

8 Student Interview

1. Have you been at this school since first grade? (If not, from what grade?)
2. What would you like to be when you grow up?
3. Think about all your fifth-grade studies and activities …
   - What was your favorite part?
   - What was the most interesting? most boring?
   - What was the most disappointing?
   - What will be most fondly remembered?
   - What did you learn the most?
   - What did you improve the most?
   - What do you still need to learn?
4. What are your strong points regarding your study habits? Your weak points?
5. Think about the various teachers you have had.
   - What kind of person is a “good teacher”?
   - What are some of the strong points of a “good teacher”?
   - Think about a teacher you do not like—what are they like?
   - What are the characteristics you do not like about that kind of teacher?
6. What do you like about your teacher’s classroom teaching? What don’t you like?

[If I had time, I asked about specific subject matters—math, social studies, science, Japanese, art, music, and home economics, in that order.]

7. What student councils and monitor duties did you do?
    - How were they assigned?
    - What did you learn from your monitor duties? from student council work?
    - What other kinds of jobs/duties do you have in the classroom?
    - What do you like about these duties? What do you not like about these duties?
8. Do you like working in groups (*han*)
    - What do you like about it?
    - What don't you like about it?
    - Have you ever been a *han-cho*?
    - What kind of *han-cho*? (i.e., what did you do)
    - How was it? What did you like (about being a *han-cho*)? What did you not like?
    - What were the difficult parts about being a *han-cho*?
9. Do your parents help you with school-related activities or homework? In what ways do they help you?
10. In a previous questionnaire, I asked what you thought a "good student" was.

    What is a "bad student"?

9 Teacher Survey

1. What are your main goals as a teacher?
2. What do you do for your own professional development?
    a. Within-school activities:

b. Outside-school activities:
c. With whom do you consult individually?
d. What kinds of books or publications do you read?
e. Other:

3. What kinds of readings have made the most impression on you professionally?
   a. Regarding education:
   b. Regarding child development, students:
   c. Regarding teacher preparation:
   d. In general:

Next I would like to ask some questions regarding textbooks.

4. What kind of input do you have in the textbook revision process? What kind of input would you like to have?
5. When textbooks are changed, what kinds of changes generally occur?
6. When textbooks are changed, what kinds of influence does this have on your teaching?
7. Since you have been a teacher, have textbooks changed a lot? Please explain the ways they have or have not changed.
8. What kind of input do you have in the textbook selection process?
9. What criteria are used for textbook selection?
   Please be specific. For example, list the criteria for social studies or for math, etc.
10. Who makes the final decision?
11. Are the textbooks published by different publishers very different?
    In what ways are they different? the same?
12. Do you teach the textbook in page number order?
    If not, what changes do you make? Please specify some changes you have made and why you did so.

13. Do you supplement the textbook with materials and activities? Please give an example.
14. Do you ever change the curriculum? In what ways? Please give an example.
15. Are different subject matters well integrated? If they are, please give a good example. If not, please give a troublesome example.

10 Parent Survey

1. By the time your child graduates from elementary school, what kind of child would you like them to be? What would you like them to learn in school?
   Regarding their studies…
   Regarding their life in general…
2. What kind of job would you like them to have in the future?
3. Compared with your own childhood school life, are there any differences in schools today? Please be specific.
4. What do you think are the strong points of Japanese education?
5. What do you think are the weak points of Japanese education?
6. What are the strong points of your child's school?
7. What are the weak points of your child's school?
8. What would you like to change about the Japanese educational system?
9. What would you like to change about your child's school?

   What kind of contact do you have with your child's school and/or homeroom teacher?
   What could be done to make the ties between home and school stronger?

What do you do for your child’s education?

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Not Often	Never
a.	Take care of child's health	5	4	3	2	1
b.	Straighten up child's school supplies	5	4	3	2	1
c.	Give them a study and desk	5	4	3	2	1
d.	Warn them about school needs	5	4	3	2	1
e.	Participate in PTA	5	4	3	2	1
f.	Go to parent observation days	5	4	3	2	1
g.	Participate in school affairs	5	4	3	2	1
h.	Bring snack to them while studying	5	4	3	2	1
i.	Make/prepare materials for school	5	4	3	2	1
j.	Help with homework	5	4	3	2	1
k.	Talk with spouse about child's	5	4	3	2	1

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Not Often	Never
	education					
l.	Talk with child about improvements	5	4	3	2	1
m.	Enroll child in *juku*	5	4	3	2	1
n.	Hire a private tutor	5	4	3	2	1
o.	If you do anything else, please list here:_____					

List three traits that you would like your child to have:

List three traits that you would not like your child to have:

What do you expect of your child's teacher? Please list traits for the kind of teacher you would like your child to have.

If a child has "good *shitsuke*" (discipline, manners), what are they like?

For school life, what is the most important *shitsuke* that home can provide?

At school, what is the most important *shitsuke* that the teacher can provide?

In order to encourage your child to study, what kinds of things do you do or say? Specifically, do you give any rewards or punishments? For example, if they do their homework perfectly or get good grades, what do you do or say? Or, if they do not do their homework or get bad grades, what do you do or say? Please list anything else:

C
Data Map

These are some of the items I collected during my research:

1. School artifacts:
    - school backpacks; school hat; school name badge
    - art, calligraphy, and home economics kits
    - gym clothes and bag; swimming suit and bag, jump rope
    - mathematics set (first grade)
    - textbooks, all grade levels, all subject matters, several publishers
    - lunch box, lunch mat, picnic supplies
    - pencil case, pencils, erasers, scissors, ruler, glue, pencil sharpener
    - toys, stickers, stationery
    - notebooks
    - cleaning rag
2. School documents:
    - school brochure (*Gakko Kyoiku Yoran*)
    - budgets
    - rules
    - newsletters
    - health posters
    - yearly plans, goal setting
    - yearbook
    - meeting minutes, handouts, event planning
3. Teacher documents:

- lesson plans
- homework, tests, handouts, grade book
- parent newsletters
- diary
- teacher intern diary
- music sheets

4. Student products:
    - notebooks, every subject; homework; drill sheets; tests
    - posters, monitor duties, group goals
    - reflections: New Year resolutions, mother thank-you letters, on friendship, good-bye letters, after field trips
    - report cards, test scores, IQ test scores, sports tests
    - art projects, calligraphy samples
    - vacation plans, homework
    - special events programs
5. Interviews: principals, vice principals, teachers, parents, students, teacher trainees
6. Surveys: principals, vice principals, teachers, parents, students
7. Slides, photographs, videotapes:
    - slides of all activities, subject matters, school environs, facilities, wall decorations
    - photographs (see slides), also timed black-and-white photos, every 3 minutes of same classroom area during social studies and math
    - videotapes of all activities, subject matters, targeting social studies and math, and keeping the videotape focused on the same students (over 200 hours)
8. Observation notes:

- detailed accounts—raw data, throughout each observation day, by the minute
- daily summary sheets—one-page memos, summarizing key events
- daily diary
- informal interview

9. Other: notes from teacher research groups, seminars, in-service training workshops

D
List of Objectives for Moral Education Program

The following list is excerpted verbatim from the English version of the *Course of Study for Elementary Schools in Japan*, Notification No. 155 of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Educational and Cultural Exchange Division, UNESCO and International Affairs Department, Science and International Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Government of Japan, 1983.

This course of study was put into effect on April 1, 1980, and was in effect during this research period. It is revised about every 10 years. This list is from Chapter 3, “Moral Education,” pages 111–116.1 have listed only the main points; each point has a short paragraph to explain its intent. All words and punctuation are listed as published.

1. To hold life in high regard, to promote good health, and to maintain safety.
2. To observe good manners, and to live in an orderly manner.
3. To keep oneself neat and tidy, and to make good use of goods and money.
4. To act according to their own beliefs, and not to be moved unreasonably by other’s opinions.
5. To respect another’s freedom as well as one’s own, and to be responsible for one’s own acts.

6. To act always cheerfully and sincerely.
7. To love justice and hate injustice, and to act righteously with courage.
8. To endure hardships and persist to the end for the accomplishment of one’s right aims.
9. To reflect upon oneself by listening attentively to the advice of others, and to act with prudence and live an orderly life.
10. To love nature, and to have affection towards animals and plants with a tender heart.
11. To esteem beautiful and noble things, and to have a pure mind.
12. To know one’s own characteristics, and to develop one’s strong points.
13. To be always filled with aspiration, to aim toward higher goals, and to strive for their realization.
14. To think about things in a rational way, and always to have an attitude of inquiry.
15. To apply ones original ideas, and to cultivate actively new fields.
16. To be kind to everybody, and to care for the weak and the unfortunate.
17. To respect those who devote themselves to others, and to appreciate their work.
18. To trust in and to be helpful to one another.
19. To be fair and impartial to everybody without prejudice.
20. To understand others’ feelings and positions, and to forgive others’ faults generously.
21. To understand the rules and the significance of making rules by oneself, and to follow them willingly.
22. To assert one’s rights properly, and to perform one’s duties faithfully.
23. To appreciate the value of work, and to co-operate actively in the service of others.

24. To take care of public property, and to protect public morality with a full awareness of being a member of society.
25. To love and respect all members of one’s family, and to strive to have a good home.
26. To love and respect people at school, and to strive to establish good school traditions.
27. To love the nation with pride as a Japanese, and to contribute to the development of the nation.
28. To have proper understanding of the love towards the people of the entire world, and to become an individual who can contribute to the welfare of mankind.

E
Detailed Accounts from Daily Research Notes

1. Umi, Friday 1/29/88—subject matter study: art, math, social studies, calligraphy.
2. Mori, Tuesday 2/2/88—subject matters: poetry, physical education, math, singing.

1 Umi, Mr. Seki's Classroom: Friday, January 29, 1988

At the teachers' meeting, two teachers mention problems: one saw students writing on the subway walls and another noticed students playing where they were not allowed. At 8:40, the whole school is assembled on the playground for their end-of-the-week school assembly planned by the student assembly committee. Today's game is called "*karuta tori*," a card game played similar to a traditional game in which the first part of a poem is read, and from among many cards displayed on the table, the players must quickly grab the card that contains the latter part of the poem. For this whole-school assembly, however, the committee has made huge cardboard cards, each with one Japanese syllable written on it, and has laid them in rows on the blacktop. Representatives from each class are selected to be the contestants, one grade level at a time. One student reads a riddle and the contestants must run to find the card with the first syllable of the answer. Other students have fun cheering on their classmates.

(9:01) Mr. Seki's morning message today reads: "Good Morning. Prepare for first-period art class and then don't be late for the whole-school assembly out on the playground." Nagai-kun is the *toban* today. He tells everyone to stand, admonishes Wong-san, "do that later," and begins the morning greetings. No one has any notices or issues, so he turns the floor over to the teacher. (9:02) Mr. Seki says, "Okay, I have some warnings, several, so listen well. Where do you play during free period? You must play on the playground. Why? So teachers can see everyone. Some people play tag in the classrooms, hallways, and on the veranda." He interrupts, "Wong-san, do that later." [She is drawing in a notebook.] "If you do this, you cause much trouble to other teachers. You are not allowed to go into other rooms without asking. Second, I don't know whether any students in this class are responsible, but some students were writing bad words on the subway walls. Someone caught them and they ran away." At 9:10, he tells people who studied to put their work in one place, and he tells people who were unable to carefully study that they should be finished by now.

(9:11) Students file out of the room quietly! [I note in my notes.] The quietest they have been yet. Mr. Seki calls Arao-kun to explain things to him. [He often goes through the student leaders for many class management and disciplining issues. The same is true for the principal with respect to grade-level teachers. Each grade level has one head teacher (usually determined by seniority) and dealing with issues is channeled through that leader.]

In art, the teacher tells them to get their stencils and stencil cutting boards. The art room is set up with six large tables. Students sit in assigned seats, and each table is one *han* (group). By 9:17, most have their work and some have started working. (9:18) The *toban* leads the greeting; all students stand on command and no one is talking. The art teacher is in full control.

On days when students are noisy as they enter, she sends them back to their homeroom in order to return to art class properly (i.e., without talking). She is an older, proper, no-nonsense woman, kind and serious in her work. She says, “There are still some students whose hands aren’t aligned.” Several students straighten their arms and place them at their sides. When everyone is standing correctly, she signals the *toban* to begin class.

As she begins the day’s explanation, she sternly calls a name. “What places should we be careful about? Who can tell us?” She calls on Wong-san, who answers, “Be careful about thin areas.” “That’s good,” the teacher replies. “Two more points, who remembers?” Another boys answers, “Be careful of the connecting areas.” “Good, one more…” No one raises their hand, so the teacher continues, “Don’t cut every which way. If you do cut through, you can fix it with tape.” (9:26) She says, “Go ahead and work, any questions?” She calls on Koyama-kun and says, “Koyama-kun was sick last time, so he must get busy. Did you understand the three points?” He doesn’t respond, and she continues, “Oh, he plays, so he doesn’t know,” and they exchange understanding smiles.

The rest of the two periods, students chat and work on their own, moving around freely. Most work steadily and on their own, while others talk and move around almost continuously, both on- and off-task. All seem to enjoy the activity and the chance to talk and work on their own. Some, like Koyama-kun, do more talking and moving than working. Every 5 minutes or so, the teacher calls Koyama-kun’s name and he quickly returns to his seat. When students have problems, they go to the teacher. The teacher wanders from group to group looking over students’ work. By 10:08, about one-third of the students are applying paint to their stencils. The rest are still cutting out their stencils. (10:24) The teacher says, “Okay, time to clean up,” and explains where things should be placed. Koyama-kun is wrestling

with Taniuchi-kun; Shimizu-kun is goofing off with another boy in the corner. Two girls sweep the floor; Ogawa-kun is bothering Usui-san. (10:29) Koyama-kun runs to the back to bop a boy on the head with a fan. (10:31) The teacher says, “Sit down.” They close the period with the standard greetings. The bell rings and Koyama-kun instantly wrestles playfully with the same boy he had hit with the fan.

They return to class by 10:39, and pairs or small groups of students play on their own, read, or chase each other. The same pairs or trios get together each recess, with a few changes every now and again. The same boys get together and decide their teams by rock-scissors-paper before taking the ball out to the playground to play (Arao-kun, Ogawa-kun, Kawata-kun, and Hirai-kun). At the last minute, another boy and Nagai-kun join them.

(10:47) The bell rings; students do their quick greetings. (10:49) Mr. Seki tells one girl to sit down, then “Everyone sit down. I am writing a word problem; copy it in your notebooks.” Ogawa-kun asks a question (Should we go ahead and solve it?), Mr. Seki repeats, “Write the problem.” Meanwhile, Taji-kun is looking at Koyama-kun’s fan. By 10:50, Mr. Seki has written: “The price of one item is 900 yen, which includes a 20% profit above the stock price. What is the stock price?” Students keep asking the teacher the same question (“Can we go ahead?… Can we go ahead?”) and he calmly replies, “That’s number 3… that’s the fourth time…” Eventually, students stop asking the question.

(10:54) As he underlines the words price, *profit*, and *stock price*, he says, “Think of the relationship between these, memorize it, and write it in your notebooks.” One boy has written it and sits properly, with his back straight and hands clasped behind his back. Mr. Seki remarks, “Oh, Eto-kun is so fast,” then, “whether you are done or not, put your pencils down.”

Meanwhile, several students have looked at Eto-kun when the remark was made and several adjust their postures similar to his.

Mr. Seki looks at Koizumi-san and Nagai-kun and says, “There are two bags on the floor.” Nagai-kun leans over, picks a bag up, and yells, “Who’s is this?” and tries to put the bags away several times. Kawata-kun says, “What a pain, be more quiet, please.” This takes just a minute and Mr. Seki continues, “How do you write 20% in decimal form?” He calls on Koyama-kun, who says the right answer, and students randomly mumble, “I agree.” Mr. Seki continues graphically writing the problem on the board as individual students raise their hands to answer his question. When one student says the wrong answer, students say, “I disagree,” and raise their hands to give the right answer.

(11:05) After another problem about the prices of various vegetables, he asks students, “Who would have bought this item?” and most students raise their hand. He asks Nishiguchi-kun how much, and he does not know the answer. He asks about another vegetable, and several students raise their hands immediately, “ah, how fast.” He calls on someone who hesitates. “I’ll give you a hint,” he says. She answers correctly. “Well, today is the last day, so do drills. We will have a test. When you are done with drills, I’ll put the answers on the board. Check your answers yourself.”

(11:08) He asks, “Are you done?” Several students yell, “No, no.” Mr. Seki says, “If you are not done yet, hurry and finish. If you are done, do the review exercises on page 73, then show me… Begin.” In another minute, Mr. Seki says, “Tomorrow, we will have the math test.” And students groan. For the next 20 minutes, students work at their desks, but waves of noise rise and subside, most consulting with and helping each other on their work, but others gossip and idly chat while they work. Students go up to have Mr.

Seki check their work, and if they are finished, they find other things to keep them busy.

(11:33) A boy hands back student diaries from Mr. Seki, who says, “Please form four-person groups. After you have formed your group, look at the TV.” (11:37) “Have you formed your groups?” Mr. Seki asks. “Oh, Wada-kun’s group got together very well. So did Koizumi-san’s group. If I call your name, come with me. Others work on your studies.” One minute later, the group that left the room with Mr. Seki returns with globes, one person per group.

(11:47) Mr. Seki tells the students to look at the television because the program is starting in 1 minute. “You are not allowed to do anything else.” He then calls the names of several students who are still working. This educational television program is on how children in Japans snow country live. Several pairs of neighboring students whisper to one another, and Taji-kun does his math homework. They alternatively watch the TV and talk to one another, but most students watch attentively. (12:02) Mr. Seki reminds them, “It would be better if you do your math homework at home.” The show ends and he tells them to get out their map homework. Several boys go to their lockers in the back of the room.

(12:03) Mr. Seki continues, “Well, today’s topic is the special characteristics of Japan’s geography,” and he points to the topic he has written on the board. He says, “Shhh… okay, we will conclude our study of Japan’s special characteristics.” And after a pause, “Very few *han* have finished getting ready.” Some students get up to do things. He calls on three students to summarize what they have studied, and Mr. Seki tells them they have done a fine summary.

(12:06) Koyama-kun is looking at the globe. Ogawa-kun and Taji-kun yell at him and take the globe back. “Hey,” he says, “it’s okay if I look at it.

Give it back." Mr. Seki comments, "If you haven't written anything in your notebooks, that's bad." Ogawa-kun points to Koyama-kun's notebook and says, "Nothing is written… bad news." Mr. Seki says, "Some people are being bothersome. I can't hear. If you are talking, that's bad, then no one can hear at all." Ogawa-kun says, "Be quiet," then he tells Oda-kun, "Your notebook isn't open." Mr. Seki is standing quietly in front, checking over the classroom scene, and calmly states, "There are still people talking." Kato-san chides Koyama-kun, who is resting his chin on his desk, "That's a second-grade posture. Sit up!" Ogawa-kun repeats, "Be quiet." Mr. Seki, still waiting, finally says, "Koyama-kun, sit properly (*chanto*)." And then asks him, "Are you writing?" Taji-kun says, "He hasn't written a thing. His textbook and notebook aren't even out on his desk." Mr. Seki states, "Koyama-kun, you must understand everything."

(12:12) Mr. Seki reviews what he has written on the board. Other students answer when he asks a question. Meanwhile, Kato-san tells Koyama-kun, "Quit it," since he is still chatting and taking things. [I find both students and teachers highly tolerant of Koyama-kun's almost constant movement and chatter.](12:16) Mr. Seki tells students to consult with each other in their groups and find the rest of the places. Only half of the four-person groups are truly working together. The others work on their own or pair up and leave some students out. Mr. Seki calls on one student to present what his group found, and admonishes, "Some people are not paying attention." (12:18) Mr. Seki chides, "There are some *han* who are not raising their hands." And after another student says an answer, Mr. Seki adds, "There are still people talking." Another student answers, just a few students say, "I agree," and Mr. Seki says, "This is important. You must remember this. What are the biggest islands?" And he has all the students recite them twice because the first time was done too softly. Ogawa-kun has

an answer wrong and talks out loud to himself wondering how that happened.

Mr. Seki continues, “Tomorrow we will have a test on what we have studied so far.” Students all say, “Huhhh?” Mr. Seki repeats, “We will have a test on the information up to page 103 in your textbook.” Some students want to know how many points, and Mr. Seki just replies, “Return your desks to their proper position and leaders take your globes back.” Taji-kun yells at Koyama-kun to write it all down. Another boy walks by Koyama-kun and lightly slaps him on the head.

(12:27) The period has ended, but some students still work. Others hand out notices and Mr. Seki says, “Whoever has not received a notice, come get it now.” The rest of the students are getting ready for lunch. (12:35) One lunch *toban* yells, “if you don t sit properly (*chanto*), we cannot eat.” He then calls some names. Nagai-kun (in his *toban* role) yells, “Be quiet! If you aren’t quiet, we won’t be allowed to eat.” Finally, the two *toban* get students’ attention and say, “*itadakimasu*.” Students begin teasing one another immediately. One student is trying to put stickers on another one’s rear end. Shimizu-kun says, “What are you doing?… Why…?” Nagai-kun says, “Because he’s being a pain…” Nagai-kun tells another student to clear off his desk, and says, “Except for Shimizu-kun’s *han*, everyone else is good Be quiet!” Another boy tells Nagai-kun, “Just warn them once.”

(12:48) The *toban* call the noon meeting to order. “Are there any notices or reminders? Some *han* are talking; from now on if I call a *han*, that’s a warning. Next, the teacher’s turn.” Mr. Seki begins to talk, Nagai-kun admonishes someone, and Mr. Seki says, “Not while I’m talking … I have a lot of things to say today.” He mentions some special skating activity, announces a special event happening in another district, reminds them of tomorrow’s tests, and reviews their activities for sixth period, school work

time. At 12:51, the meeting is over, several students go to get seconds, and there is nothing left. (1:02) They end lunch with the traditional grace: *gochisoosama deshita*. Before and after lunch, Mr. Seki has called several students to his desk to admonish them: Koyama-kun, Wada-kun, Oda-kun, and Usui-san.

Students mingle in the classroom during recess, but at 1:17, Mr. Seki tells all the students to go outside to play. (1:23) Students are back in the classroom preparing their desks for calligraphy. Ogawa-kun and Nagai-kun are telling people to be quiet. Arao-kun tells everyone to sit down. Koyama-kun is looking for his calligraphy kit, and even comes to me asking if I know where it is. Arao-kun calls Koyama-kun and tells him it is rather late to be looking for it now. Taji-kun tells Koyama-kun to close the curtain. Another student has placed some newspapers in the way and someone says, "This is a bad place. Someone could slip," and other students move the paper.

Mr. Seki says, "Let me go over this once again … if you have this paper size, fold it in half to put it away." He goes over the *kanji* for the day, though the students have their own textbooks that show the proper way to write each *kanji*. Then he hands out a copy of today's *kanji*. "These are the points to be careful about…" The stroke order, angle of the strokes, and the way they are brought to a finish are all important. One line tapers off with a slight curve at the end, another line ends with strong definition, and yet another just trails off to a fine point. He tells them to practice until about 1:50. He tapes up the sample on the front blackboard.

(1:35) Most students are working, though Koyama-kun is still preparing his stuff. Mr. Seki walks around the room correcting people's posture or especially the way they are holding the brush. Ideally, it should be held perpendicular to the paper, one's back straight, hand upright, and arm

moving comfortably, but aligned with the rest of one's posture. He tells one boy to be more careful and take his time. He tells another to draw his lines more boldly; another is all out of proportion. He shows another the importance of spacing. Others are fine. To Wong-san, he says, "Ah, that's a good, healthy *kanji*" The period ends at 2:07 and students go to their cleaning chores, then prepare for free activity period, playing sports today: soccer, basketball, and gymnastics.

2 Mori, Mr. Ito's Classroom: Tuesday, February 2, 1988

(8:44) The teachers' meeting begins with announcements: two visitors are expected tomorrow; be careful with the heaters; and one boy has turned in 20 yen [about 15 cents], so the owner should contact Mrs. Fujita to reclaim it. Usually, the principal does not have much to add to the daily meeting, but today he has three points to make. The first is that the end-of-the-year student guidance report is due soon, and he would like them to do it very thoroughly and conscientiously. Second, he would like their suggestions to be based on what the students are actually doing, and his third point is that he wants the content to be concrete and specific, based on actual practice. The meeting ends on that note.

(8:54) Today, Mr. Ito immediately goes to class. "*Kiritsu* [stand up]," he says crisply. I am amazed, it is completely quiet. Everyone in unison says, "Good morning," in loud voices. Mr. Ito quickly begins by asking the students to think about what they want. He tells them they will soon be sixth graders and they should think about what that means. "You do anything for the teacher, you do anything for your parents … you are human beings. You are not animals. All people are human beings and you should think about this. That's very important. Human beings have *ishi* [will, volition, intention, purpose]."

(8:58) Mr. Ito continues with the morning announcements. Tomorrow is the bean tossing ceremony [a traditional ceremony to end winter and welcome spring], so they cannot use part of the gymnasium. He continues with another story about a fast woman marathon runner and how it must take strong character to run it. “You should think about what kind of person you want to be. Try your best and you will become good people.”

(9:04) Next, he explains a poem he has posted and who the poet is [roughly translated: “the sounds of the running water, sprouts of the *warabi* plant, reminders that spring is near”]. He has the whole group repeat phrase by phrase as he reads. Then they read it altogether. He calls on individuals to read it one by one: “Great [skillful] (*umai*),” he says to Kishi-san; “Very good (*daibu iiyo*)” after Imai-kun reads, but he is slightly embarrassed because he made one mistake; and “Good,” once Tokugawa-san reads. (9:06) Everyone reads the poem together again, and he says, “Great,” and has them all recite it once again.

(9:07) Mr. Ito begins probing the meaning. “What is running?” Students call out their responses: dog, cat, person. Nakano-kun says, “I don’t know,” in informal dialect. Mr. Ito looks at them, “Water!” Koike-kun responds, “Huh? Not a person?” And Aoki-kun says, “Oh, yeah … yeah …” Mr. Ito points out the word whose second *kanji* means water. Mr. Ito’s voice becomes more animated, “In spring …” Miki-kun interrupts, “Teacher, question …” “Yes,” says Mr. Ito. “What is *warabi*?” “*Warabi*? You’ve studied that!” And the group of students sitting in front nod their heads and say, “Yeah.” Miki-kun sincerely and innocently says, “I don’t know. Can you please draw a picture?” And Mr. Ito draws the curly cue whisps that represent the tips characteristic of the *warabi* plant.

“Okay?” asks Mr. Ito, and he asks if there are any other questions. Miki-kun whispers to Imai-kun. “Why *warabi*?” asks Mr. Ito. “February, March,

April, are they all the same season… spring?" "What?!" students respond in disbelief. "You don't know …" Mr. Ito scolds teasingly, "You remember!" He writes a word whose two *kanji* mean, "season" and "divide" or "separate." "What is this?" he asks. "Season … to divide … which seasons are divided?" he asks in rising volume. [No students raise their hands or attempt to answer.] "It's spring and winter!" he practically shouts. And students say, "I get it!" and start buzzing to each other.

(9:15) Mr. Ito tells them to recite it again and think about the meaning. "What kind of season is it and when is it?" He calls on several students, each answering the beginning of spring and specifying which month, for example, Koike-kun says, "I think it is March because a lot of flowers bloom then." Mr. Ito repeats this response. Nakano-kun gives another explanation that I cannot hear through the background murmuring, and Mr. Ito says, "These are all good explanations. Anyone else?"

(9:17) Mr. Ito sums, "It is probably the beginning of spring. Even though it is cold, the water is flowing quickly, so spring is coming, isn't it?" He tells them to imagine the water flowing over the rocks. "What kind of feeling do you get?" he asks. One student explains, "lighthearted or cheerful" because spring is coming; Mr. Ito amplifies the response with a word meaning buoyant, and some students giggle. "There's a second meaning one could think about," and he writes, "keenly or deeply felt, to have a quiet talk." Now, all students are talking to one another, laughing, and commenting. "Think about which one you like better," says Mr. Ito.

(9:19) Miki-kun says, "I only like the first one. Winter is cold, but in spring, you can play." Koike-kun explains how the second one fits his thinking. Suzuki-san explains that she also thinks the second one is better. "Give your own thoughts, please," encourages Mr. Ito, and he calls on Aoki-kun. "Uhhh…," he pauses and apologizes for not really feeling

strongly for either one. Mr. Ito says, “It doesn’t matter…” And Aoki-kun says, “the lively, cheerful feeling.”

(9:23) “I’ll give you a hint,” says Mr. Ito. He tells them that the poem was written long ago in the 1300s. “What do you think life was like back then?” Koike-kun says, “They didn’t have Western clothes.” “That’s right,” says Mr. Ito. “Food was scarce,” says Miki-kun. “They didn’t have ceilings,” says another boy. “Huhh?” the rest of the students say almost in unison. (9:26) Mr. Ito explains the kind of winters they had, then asks, “Now who thinks the feelings were lighthearted and cheerful?” No one raises their hand. Mr. Ito chides them, “You’re not thinking on your own at all! How come no one dares to be different?” But he continues explaining what life was like, that they always ate cabbage, and asks if the students understand.

The poem is a *tanka*; like *haiku*, it has a certain number of syllables and a rhythmic pattern along with traditional topics and images. (9:28) “These kinds of feelings are not expressed,” says Mr. Ito as he points to the cheerful option. Miki-kun says, “Oh, you said that …” Then Mr. Ito instructs them to write their own *tanka*.

(9:31) Mr. Ito comments, “Please think about what kind of period that was, what it was like. Now Japan has 12 million people, back then just 6 million people …” Students immediately start conferring and talking with each other when he finishes speaking. (9:35) He asks another question and calls on Tatematsu-kun. At first, Mr. Ito says, “I can’t hear,” and after the second time, he elaborates upon Tatematsu-kun’s point. Different students offer answers, so Mr. Ito tells them to draw a picture. “If you draw a picture, you’ll probably understand better.” Students call out to Mr. Ito and they laugh. Nakano-kun has an explanation and all the students say, “What?” Mr. Ito laughs, “That doesn’t make any sense.”

(9:40) Students talk as they work. Mr. Ito yells at two boys in front: Koike-kun and Uchida-kun. Mr. Ito walks up and down the aisles reading students' notebooks. Muraki-san asks Mr. Ito what the last two syllables mean. "Ahh … good question." And he explains that it is an unfinished ending, one that trails off giving the sense of "oh, it is probably so…," encouraging one's imagination as it trails off. He repeats that the feelings should mean keenly or deeply felt, and has them recite the poem two more times. (9:45) He shows them *tanka* written by a previous class. One is the brother of one of the girls. Another has the same name as Uchida-kun, so he smiles and says, "Hey, thats my name!" (9:48) The bell rings, ending the period, and Mr. Ito says, "Do you understand?" One boy answers, "I don't know," and they break.

(9:53) Mr. Ito opens this period where he left off last period. "From now we will write our own *tanka?* "Huhh?" the students respond. "Look out the window for inspiration," continues Mr. Ito. He slaps Mita-kun on the head to get his attention. "Ouch." He then tells Imai-kun to sit down and says, "My explanation was not very good …" He finishes explaining the form and function of *tanka*, then tells them to consult with each other at their desks.

(9:58) Students begin to go up to the front to show Mr. Ito their work. Nakano-kun is first followed by Koike-kun and Imai-kun. Mr. Ito praises Imai-kun, and Miki-kun says, "Way to go, Koike." Mr. Ito writes his *tanka* on the board. The noise level rises, and students start to move from their seats. "Okay, take your seats," warns Mr. Ito.

(10:02) Mr. Ito continues to read poems and comments on each one. Most students leave his desk with a smile. Students confer, read each other's work, hit each other, laugh, write on their own, talk, ask questions, and give advice. By 10:21, he has written eight students' *tanka* on the

board. [These students range from the top-ranked students to the bottom-ranked students in the class, based on grades and test scores.] Mr. Ito repeats the rhythm pattern and explains, “Keep writing a lot on your own and it gets easier. You will understand more the more you write. Now don’t talk to your neighbor. Fix your desks.”

(10:29) He says, “Think of a picture in your mind … then write.” In a few minutes, more students come up. He tells one, “It’s not bad… but…” (10:33) The bell rings, and he tells them to write three more at home for homework. All the students groan and complain.

During recess, I accompany Mr. Ito to the teachers’ room. (10:55) We go to the gymnasium, where the students are dressed in their gym clothes and running about. “Sit down … Hey! Listen,” he yells. He asks who is working on headstands and changes the lines a bit. (10:57) Mr. Ito is leading them through warm-up exercises, a set of dance steps done to counts of eight. Everyone does them together in their lines. (11:01) They spread out to practice jump rope. (11:03) He gathers them together to show them different types of jumping: fast (two turns to one jump), forward and back, crossing one’s arms. They then spread out to practice on their own and in groups. Some boys just stand and talk. On the whole, they are stronger and more athletic than Umi students.

(11:22) Students put out the mats. The stunt for the day is a handstand ending into a forward roll. Some are still practicing the forward roll, then a headstand into a forward roll. At 11:24, Mr. Ito yells, “Practice!” and he helps the boys. (11:31) He stops them and they put the vaulting horses up. He’s stern and expects all the students to be able to do each stunt. He tells them what they are doing wrong that is preventing them from doing the stunt and helps spot their work. They are trying to do headsprings over the vaulting horse. Eight can do it very well, four cannot do it and need help,

and the rest can get by. When their friends are just about to take off, they yell, “Do your best…” and use their nicknames, usually shortened versions of their real names, first or last. When someone who has failed in the past finally makes it over, many students clap and cheer automatically. When they fail, many laugh or wince and say, “Ouch,” then laugh.

(11:44) Students put away the equipment and return to class to change into their street clothes and to prepare for mathematics.

(11:53) Math begins when Mr. Ito tells them to read the words he has written on the board: (1) ratio [in *kanji*]; (2) percent *[paasento* in *katakana*]; and (3) % [the symbol]. In order to get the students to understand the concept of relative comparison, he has the tallest boy come up and stand next to him. “Who is tall?” Then he has the shortest boy come up to stand next to the boy who is short compared with Mr. Ito. “Now who is tall?” he asks. He then has an average student come up to the front. “Whether one is tall or short depends on your point of comparison, so be careful. It is all relative,” he explains.

(11:59) He writes three sets of words, “the number that is the standard for comparison,” “the number to be compared,” and “ratio.” He asks them to read the last word because the *kanji* are more difficult. All the students recite it together, “*wariai?* Then he erases the *kanji* and asks them to recite it again without looking. He asks, “What is the relationship between these three words? Think about it…”

(12:01) Mr. Ito continues to write, “For example, Hirayama-kun’s weight is 40 kilograms, and the teacher’s weight is 60 kilograms. If you make Hirayama-kun’s weight the standard for comparison, what ratio is the teacher’s weight in comparison?” He has the students recite the problem aloud. He then draws a line, which he labels “1.” He draws a second line underneath. As Nakano-kun explains, “The teacher is bigger,” Mr. Ito draws

the line longer. “What?” says Mr. Ito as if to question the response, and Miki-kun echoes, “Huhh?” But Nakano-kun is sure of his answer, “Why do you say that?” Mr. Ito confirms Nakano-kun’s answer and asks Hanada-san how to solve the problem. She says nothing. He asks, “Is it more or less than one?” Then asks the class to raise their hands to vote on which they think is correct. As a trick question, he reverses the order and asks again.

(12:05) “What should we do next?,” he asks. Nakano-kun is raising his hand, “I know!… teacher… I know!” in his noticeably loud voice [this mannerism of raising his hand and calling the teacher loudly is his special characteristic; often he is not correct, but he keeps trying, not afraid to give his opinion]. “Wait a minute,” replies Mr. Ito, “Who does not understand?” About two-thirds of the students raise their hands. “Okay, put your hands down.” He calls Muraki-san to the board, and she writes the quantity represented by the line marked “1,” which is Hirayama-kun’s weight, 40 kg. On the longer line, she marks a segment of line, equal in length, and marks that “40,” then marks the remaining segment “20.” Mr. Ito calls Shiraki-san to explain how to figure out the answer. “It’s all right to explain it in words,” he adds. “Write it down; it’s easier when you can see it sometimes.” She doesn’t offer an answer. Ikeda-kun raises his hand, goes to the board, and writes 60 divided by 40. Mr. Ito says, “Good” Miki-kun claps and says, “Congratulations.” Mr. Ito looks to the whole class, reads the problem as written by Ikeda-kun, and says, “That’s it, isn’t it? Sure it is.” He explains it in other words, “That’s the way to do it, right?” and asks who now understands. Nine students raise their hands.

(12:11) “You should understand,” comments Mr. Ito. “If you divide the number to be compared by the number that is the standard for comparison, you get the ratio.” He has the students say it as he writes the equation in yellow chalk. “This is important!” He then goes through the different

possible equations. “If you are given the ratio and the standard for comparison, you multiply them to get the number of comparison. What if you want to figure out the number that is the standard for comparison?” He writes, “the number of comparison divided by the ratio is the original standard for comparison.” Quickly, he erases the equations and asks who can recite them again.

(12:14) Makita-kun tries; he gets the first one. Kotaka-kun gives the second one, and Mano-kun says the last equation. “Good,” says Mr. Ito, as he writes five words in yellow chalk: ratio (*wariai*), rate (*buai*), comparatively smaller number (*shoosuu*), fraction (*bunsuu*), percentage (*hyaku bun ritsu*). He continues, “Our class has 37 students, and the class next door has 39 students. What is the ratio of our class compared with the other?” He calls on Sano-kun, who has no answer. He tells Sano-kun to fill the numbers into the equation. He can’t. “Of course, he still does not understand,” and he has the students call out the numbers: 37 divided by 39, and announces that students should do the next set of drills. Students groan and try to negotiate a change. Mr. Ito ignores them.

(12:20) Students begin working on their drills. Nakano-kun asks if anyone has a pencil; his neighbor nudges him and points to Nakano-kun’s pencil next to his notebook. “Oh there it is,” he muses. Students begin questioning and helping each other as soon as they begin working on their own. Mr. Ito walks up and down the aisles helping students who do not understand. He takes a moment to yell at Koike-kun, who is goofing off. In my notes, there are always about four pairs or threesomes of students consulting with one another, but the names change. Sano-kun is not getting very far. He has started five problems but cannot finish any. Mr. Ito sits in front at 12:26.

(12:28) The bell rings, but students still work; it is completely quiet at 12:30. (12:32) Mr. Ito helps different students again. As he checks a few students' work, he says, "Those that are done help others," and he tells two students to get lunch. In another minute, he says, "Okay, let's finish up."

By 12:43, they have finished serving lunch, and Mr. Ito makes an announcement that I cannot hear over the noise. He turns on the television. Today's lunch is chicken teriyaki, stir-fry vegetables, rice, and glazed sweet potatoes. Mr. Ito explains that during lunch they will see a video of their art exhibit [from November], and he says, "*Itadakimasu*." The broadcast student council makes an announcement at 12:49, but I cannot hear because it is so noisy. Today, two large groups (seven or eight people each) pull their desks together, but the rest stay where they are. (12:53) The art exhibit video begins. When someone's project appears on the screen, the students call out and cheer. Once their exhibit is seen, they lose interest in the video. (12:59) Mr. Ito tells the students to be quiet.

The video ends at 1:05 amidst lots of noise in the classroom. Some boys have gone to the back for seconds, and one is apologizing for having taken too much. One girl has pushed Miki-kun's desk, and they laugh. Others are goofing off, yelling at each other; they are using a lot of slang and rough language, so I cannot understand many exchanges. Different boys and girls hit each other and run off.

(1:06) Mr. Ito just sits and watches, obviously waiting. One student notices; within a minute the noise level subsides, so I can hear once again. Mr. Ito softly tells them to look at the *tanka*. "Today, you have student councils and next period we will have chorus. I would like us to practice for the presentation day for your mothers on March 11." He uses polite language for this request. He explains that they will have choral singing, recite *tanka*, and do jump-rope routines at the presentation. (1:10) Students

are dismissed for recess. Three boys (Miki-kun, Hino-kun, Hirayama-kun) practice handstands in the back of the room, ("I can't do it," Hirayama-kun keeps trying and landing on his chin, then almost does it, and his friends encourage him, "Oh, almost…"). Then they play a ball game together. The other boys have gone out to play soccer. More students than usual stay inside this recess. One boy is looking at comic books with Sano-kun. A group of girls are playing with some toy. Noda-san gives me a macrame ornament she has made. Other girls are playing jump rope. I am amazed at how many students can play such rowdy games in such a small space without hitting themselves and each other. [It reminds me of the crowded trains in which people have an uncanny sense for being within millimeters of one another and still not touch or bump each other.]

(1:21) Some students head to the gymnasium for cleaning time. Once there, Hino-kun yells, "Let's play volleyball!" Boys begin stealing the ball from one another. Hino-kun bumps Okabe-kun, who yells, "Ouch … ouch!" "Are you okay?" asks Hino-kun apologetically, glancing at me. Hirayama-kun says, "Cut it out." Miki-kun rolls over the ball and starts saying, "Bye-bye." All the boys start laughing. Only Noda-san is sweeping the gym as she is supposed to. Four other boys just sit on the mats and talk, then run onto the stage. Other girls clean and play, but at least they have brooms in their hands. Next, I go to observe cleaning in the science room. On the way, I notice the principal in his work clothes watering the trees outside.

(1:38) I pop in the science room door, and I am surprised that three boys are actually cleaning (Nakano, Kotaka, and Kubota). Ikeda-kun and Hirayama-kun emerge from the back room carrying a skeleton. "We're playing," one boy explains, and they start singing a song from a popular late-night adult show. Kotaka-kun yells at Nakano-kun not to play; Ikeda-kun calls out, "Let's sing it one more time." Four girls (Maeda, Tomida,

Shiraki, and Ueno) are cleaning the other science room. They are trying to construct *tanka* together as they work. (1:48) Cleaning time is over and the boys head back to the room singing loudly.

(1:49) Back in the classroom, I arrive just as Imai-kun pushes his desk over and yells some expletive. Two girls laugh; Mr. Ito ignores it. Tashiro-san borrows a dictionary. Tomida-san works on her *tanka*. Mr. Ito tells the students to sit down. He plays the alto part of the song he wants them to sing. Students are sitting in their chorus seats. (1:51) The altos start practicing. (1:54) The sopranos sing their part. He makes them stand to practice because they don't seem to have much energy. Here and there, students are fussing with other things. After each part, Mr. Ito gives them a point total; "30 points," he says to the altos, "50 points" for the sopranos. "That's not good enough yet," chides Mr. Ito. (2:01) The sopranos sing again, "70 points, try again …" After another phrase, "60 points …listen!" And they try again, "That's weak!" he yells, and slams his hand on the piano. The students try harder, "80 points with my help. Why aren't you putting your strength into it? This is a strong school." Mita-kun has been bothering different boys about him. [Each time sounds good to me. Only later, when I hear the final product, do I realize the kind of excellence Mr. Ito is striving for here. Using this point scale is not a common way of assessing his students but conveys his feelings in this case.]

(2:03) Mr. Ito tells the altos to sing. They are louder, "Good!" he shouts, and a bit later, "Extend your voices … that's weak!" He says to Hirayama-kun, "Open your mouth to let the song come out!" (2:06) "Let's do it again. Sit down… all together… straighten yourselves …" He has the sopranos sing, then says, "Make it sound pretty, don't just yell. Sing it lightheartedly and with life." (2:13) He gathers them to sing together again, then altos and sopranos separately. He tells the sopranos that they are stiff: "Loosen your

necks.” As they sing again, he says, “That’s it… now full… ahh… that’s the image you want!”

(2:21) He has the students stand and sing together. “That’s pretty …,” he yells while they sing, “Terrific!” And he tells them to sit when they have finished the song. (2:25) He tells them to stand up for the next song, a new song for them but a traditional Japanese folk song they have heard before. When not singing, students instantly break into quiet whispers and goofing off. Mr. Ito rarely says anything, yet when he tells them to start singing, they immediately drop their side conversations and idle chat and begin singing together. He does admonish Nakano-kun for something. He tells a story explaining the background of the song, then tells them that while they are singing they should try to create that image. They sing with loud, full voices, and the bell rings at 2:33. “You did it!” says Mr. Ito. “Now prepare for returning home.” (2:37) Mr. Ito distributes blank paper and tells them to write one *haiku* and turn it in.

(2:42) Students finish their *haiku*. “Good!” exclaims Mr. Ito amidst lively student chatter and movement. “Close your eyes … think about today’s *tanka* and visualize an image.” He repeats himself two times as the students’ chatter lessens. Mr. Ito goes over the difference in meaning between two pairs of characters (from the *tanka*), both with the same pronunciation and general meaning, but the ideographs differ. The bell rings at 2:48, and he continues the discussion. (2:50) He says, “That’s it for the day. Stand up.” And the *toban* says, “Good-bye,” with the rest of the students and Mr. Ito chiming in.

Student councils are next, and I stay in Mr. Ito’s room to observe his student guidance council. (2:54) One girl works on a poster about litter in the school. Other students sit at desks waiting for the student council to begin. Mr. Ito walks in at 3:01, “Okay, what are we Doing?” The students

look blankly at him. He chuckles, and begins to explain that the fifth- and sixth-grade event on March 12 needs a program chair, and they need to write a copy of the program. Fifth graders need to make something to give the sixth graders. “Oh, last year they made a flower lei?” says one girl. “Oh, you remember well,” says another. (3:08) A boy laughs and says, “Yeah, but that’s kinda … [implying weird],” and the students start to chatter and laugh. Mr. Ito shouts, “Quit the talking.”

(3:11) The students continue their banter: one girl suggests, “Shall we give it to them with a little dance?” and she starts dancing. A boy joins the fun and does the twist. Another boy says, “Cut it out,” while two other girls are chatting and one says playfully, “Nooo… that’s a lie.” Imai-kun stumbles into the room. One boy says, “What the…!” Three girls start to sing a song. Mr. Ito continues over the chatter and explains what has been done in the past. The music teacher can supply music; one year the students did a skit. “Oh, that’s a nice idea,” says Suzuki-san, taking a break from the chatter. Students are listening, though they themselves seem to be off on different tangents alongside the main stream of thought. A girl turns around and says, “Do the students have to write it?” “Who would be good?” asks Mr. Ito. Some students point to Suzuki-san, who complains, “Yecch, I don’t want to do it.” The boys all clap, “Sure, yeah, Suzuki-san.” “I’m kind of busy …” she tries to back out of it. “It doesn’t have to be long,” encourages Mr. Ito. “Oh, okay,” she reluctantly agrees. “Is that okay?” asks Mr. Ito. “Okay, the writer is Suzuki-san. Hino-kun, you are in charge of the program … does anyone have any changes?”

(3:20) Mrs. Fujita (a sixth-grade teacher), also in charge of this council, repeats the decisions that have been made so far. “Do what you can as much as possible. If you need help, just ask…. We also need to decide on a song… a short song is fine.” She suggests a song, but I cannot hear since

the students have burst into chatter again. Mr. Ito adds amidst the noise, “The first and second graders need to practice, so quickly do the handout for them.” The teachers ask them to think about how the student representative council can help, and they tell them that they should reflect on their own roles.

Next (3:30), Mrs. Fujita guides them with a soft voice, giving a much different feel to the proceedings than Mr. Ito’s hearty, sometimes gruff but amiable manner. She says carefully, “One person should think of one idea, what goal to establish for the new year.” Various students offer one-word ideas, quickly and simultaneously, so it is hard for me to record their ideas. Some mention playing and taking responsibilities more seriously. Suzuki-san makes a point about how dirty parts of the building are. They want to change the schools image, have it be less dark and dirty…the walls and equipment. (3:37) Mr. Ito suggests writing a school history. “That’s interesting, let’s do that,” says one boy from another class. “Okay, write your own ideas for what to include, comic form is fine, you could even make a video if you want.” A student claps. Another boy has an idea that Mr. Ito asks him to repeat to the group. “We can ask the student representative council about their ideas, too.” And the day ends.

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